The Black Cat

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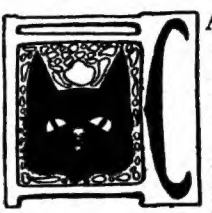
The Black Cat

Jilting Parmelia

BY LEO NOBLE BURNETT

Tiring of his sweetheart, he tried to jilt her, but the gods ruled otherwise —and he married her!



CASSIUS Coddington was tired of love. He was also tired of shaving people and rubbing powder into their homely faces. He operated Chair No. 3 in a musty barber shop which had blue checkered linoleum on the floor and baths in the rear—either tub or needle. Cassius Coddington was bored by life in general as he stood tonight gazing into the bureau mirror.

"You're a bald little devil," said his reflection in the mirror in the candid way which mirrors have.

He took up a brush and exercised it with a barber's professional skill, thereby making his hair go much farther than anyone else could have made it go under the circumstances. He switched out the light and passed with a sigh down the squeezy stairway into the heavy hotness of the street. At the corner he boarded a car for the North End where love was waiting to be spurned.

Parmelia dwelled in a dusty little house under the wing of a furniture factory which cast out black smoke by day and long sombre shadows by night. She lived with her mother and brother, the latter earning enough in the factory for the upkeep of the dusty house and the meager livelihood of its occupants. Parmelia had never worked in the sense of working, and for a year had been preparing for her marriage to Cassius; and for the most part her preparations had consisted of probing on her none-too-hasty lover to the rapid consummation of the event.

He didn't know exactly why he had ceased to be fond of her. In common they had artlessness, unoriginality and physical commonness. They were two simple souls and should have made as congenial a couple as any who take their dinners to the park on a Sunday. But somehow he wearied of her. He no longer experienced the same impulsive joy at seeing her. Her kisses were too common. Once she was a luxury, something to be attained, but now she was a habit. As the car rattled him along he determined that he would tell her tonight and have it all over with. The very thought electrified him for he was a man who was guided almost entirely by exterior forces and this spurning of Parmelia was to be the first self-

initiated act of his life, his first originality.

He scuffled up on the front porch. She had been awaiting him in a saggy hammock from which she leaped at his approach. She declared that she was startled, whereas she had heard his feet scraping the cement for almost a block.

Parmelia was a clinging maiden, a girl who would have given so much to be pretty and might have accomplished the desired result with a wealthy girl's *toilette* and some highly paid taste. She was satisfied with Cassius because he had promised that they would live in a yellow cottage with a front porch, side porch, back porch, and dome light above the dining-room table. But this was a frail bubble of a dream and he knew it. He placed his yellow straw hat on the railing, and then his feet.

She drew up a chair and they were soon chatting in a summer-night-on-the-porch undertone—that is, Parmelia was chatting, while Cassius preserved an ominous silence except for a perfunctory "Uh-huh" or unintelligible murmur now and then.

"Cassius."

He knew that she was about to ask for an assurance of his devotion. It was her constant question and he had always said "Yes." Tonight he planned to deny a whole year of yeses, but was aware that her clinging presence here at his side had melted some of the brittleness from his resolve.

"Cassius," she repeated, and leaned over in his direction just a little. "I read in a book today that sometimes men change very suddenly. Are you sure, Cassius, that you will never, never, be any different?"

He settled in his chair and crossed one foot over the other. She knew that he was not exactly normal. Feminine tact came to the front. "Let's walk," she suggested.

Whenever Cassius Coddington walked he had to smoke: he lit a cigar. Then Parmelia took his arm, thereby making a colossal blunder. He was tired of this hanging to him, body and soul. After they had walked a few blocks Cassius determined that at the next corner he would voice himself. She was speaking and he couldn't interrupt. At the end of the next block his courage balked. They came to the river and stood on the disused wharf. Far off was the slightest hint of thunder and the ferry whistle which came out of the night sounded soggy and oppressed.

"It's going to rain," announced Parmelia. And Cassius said, "Yes, wouldn't be surprised if it did." They hurried away and reached the front porch just as a few big drops came spattering down on the walk. They stood close together on the top step, each waiting for the other to speak; neither did. He couldn't tell her now. By George, it would be awkward. He would do it tomorrow. The spattering continued and by this time the hints had developed into real thunder. With a goodnight mumble he started to go and she recalled him.

"Cassius," she said, "it may seem silly to speak of it right now, but I want your photograph. You have promised hundreds of times and have never had it taken. I read in a book today—"

He turned up his coat collar and

said something to the effect that he would oblige her with a photograph if she really wished. They agreed upon tomorrow night and he hurried away through the rain.

All of the way back he meditated on his failure. He finally decided that he could never tell her boldly; it would be too difficult to introduce the subject. He must make the announcement in some subtle fashion. "Yes, I've got to sly," he pondered, "pretty sly." When his simple mind was groping for something which smacked of originality he heard the conductor call his street and got out.

The shower had been brief and had now ceased altogether, giving a cool, fresh odor to the heat-oppressed city. They say that human beings, like moths, are drawn by the light; and Cassius was no butterfly—just an average human moth. Across the street was the intense blue glow of the novelty photograph shop. Parmelia's parting request came to his mind and he passed over to the store. After gazing carelessly at the revolving strips of pictures in the window, his attention was drawn by the great glaring placard which occupied the center of the display.

LATEST
PHOTOGRAPHIC NOVELTY
FOOL YOUR FRIENDS
25 cents—FADING PHOTOS—25 cents
The face Disappears in Curious Sections—Guaranteed to Vanish Completely in One Week!

He read it again. He studied it. Then it came—creeping slowly up his spine and bursting in his brain with a shower of sparks—his second original idea. He marched in without delay and inquired of the lady at the counter. Work? Sure, always works. Place it on the table thus. In a single day the devilment begins. Then this in a half-whispered confidence: "One might suspect that spirits were at work. Not really of course. A trick of science. Wonderful thing, science!" Cassius' eyes sparkled.

"Right that way," directed the woman. He passed smilingly into the little room from which the blue light emanated. He sat self-consciously in the little bronze ice-cream-parlor chair until the slick-haired man with the big nose had snapped his picture. He ordered two and was told to call for them tomorrow. He went home directly, exulting in his idea.

During the next day two patrons of Chair No. 3 were sacrificed to the cause of originality by cruel cuts on the chin. After work Cassius called for the pictures, which were fair likenesses on cheap mounts. Every atom of him tingled with expectation. A hasty supper and he was off much earlier than usual for the North End where he was to practice his diabolical purposes.

Love bounced from the hammock, all clad in fluffy white; and he thought that she was more than ordinarily attractive, which was no idle speculation. For the moment he felt cruel and unjust, but he had gone too far to turn back. The stuffy, perfumed chamber of love was too narrow and his perspiring little heart yearned for freedom. He sat in the creaky rocking-chair and Parmelia took her accustomed station at his side.

"I've done it," he said abruptly.

"Done what?" she asked, really frightened.

"What you wanted," he explained; "had my picture taken."

He took one of the prints from his pocket and tossed it into her lap. She took it to the screened window and subjected it to a close examination by the light which came from the inside of the house.

"Say, Cassius, but that's swell!" she exclaimed. "I like that chin. You've got one of the swellest chins I ever saw. And your nose is so good-looking," she added with something of a giggle. "That's the best part of your face, Cassius, that nose."

She was partly sincere, for considering them individually, Cassius Coddington's nose and chin were no worse than other noses and chins. If Cassius were not handsome it would certainly be wrong for one to blame the nose or chin.

"It ain't much, 'Melia," he managed to say with affected modesty. "Why, in a week it won't be anything." There was the diplomatic stroke—"in a week it won't be anything."

Parmelia sat beside him again and placed her hand on the arm of his chair. There was a pause and he knew what she was about to say. "You know, Cassius, that I have funny ideas sometimes and you mustn't be angry if I always ask the same question. Are you sure, sure, sure that you love me?"

He had been waiting for this question and the answer was ready, for he had rehearsed it. These were the words that had crept into his mind when he first saw the sign in the shop window. They constituted his second original idea. He spoke with a little guilty huskiness:

"Parmelia, my love will last as long as that there picture."

She replied innocently that under such conditions his love would endure forever. He felt weak and uncomfortable. Although it was ridiculously early he stood to go. She implored him to stay, but he was firm. Furthermore, he made the startling announcement that he could not see her for a week and by that time she would understand. Understand what? No, he couldn't explain. She would understand. Humanly she sought illumination, begged for it, but he backed down the steps. Half way to the corner he turned and thought he saw a fluffy whiteness on the porch, a radiant fluffy whiteness.

His first feelings were those of remorse, but these were replaced quickly enough by an egotistical sense of his diplomacy. When he went to work in the morning he placed his likeness on the table, regarded it with his head tilted to one side and chuckled. The day was not marred by any atrocious nipping of chins, but it was a day of severe anxiety. When the shop closed he hurried home without supper.

He burst into the room, snatched up the photograph from the table and took it to the window. Yes, it was vanishing all right. But see! He didn't think it would work out that way exactly. He sat on the edge of the bed and huddled over it worriedly. His chin, his swell chin, had completely vanished! And how Parmelia would miss it! It was this very chin that she had admired so much. "If

it could only have been some other part of me," he complained and was engulfed in a great ocean of remorse. He looked again. Yes, the lower part of his face had completely evaporated.

Cassius left the house and walked for more than an hour through the crowds of unsympathetic people who poured out into the hot streets and to the levees to avoid the greater hotness of their rooms. Finally he passed through a dark side thoroughfare to his own rooming-house. He looked again at the peculiar photograph, shook his head dejectedly and lay down with a sad perspiring face and drooping heart. "Funny thing, science," he mused as he lay there. Eventually he dozed.

The razor was an uncertain object in his hands next day and when the shop curtain was drawn at quitting time he scuddled home to find what part of his face was lacking. He guessed as much—his good-looking nose. To be sure, a trace of it still remained, but it had lost its essential parts. By this time Parmelia understood and hated him.

The following day, the third epoch of his epochal week, was akin to failure. When the last patron had been sent sprayed and perfumed from the chair, he hung his starched white coat over the headrest, threw his street coat over his arm and sped home to find himself earless. About all that remained now was his bald head studded with his little eyes. The thing was uncanny. All night long the eyes peered at him from out of the darkness.

For two days more the head and eyes lingered on. The woman's suggestion about spirits always came sneaking into his mind. Surely no science could dissolve his features so devilishly. The spirit idea possessed him and spiritland sent its most grotesque inhabitants to his bedside. Weak in body and mind it was easy for him to distinguish their most striking details. In the heart of the night he heard his name whispered and valiantly hurled a wadded quilt at a whole troop of them. He leaped from bed and turned on the light. He stood there blinking and gulping in a cold sweat. Then he realized what it was all about. Over on the table was his single remaining organ.

All Parmelia had of him was an eye!

Cassius often thought of destroying the picture, but there was a peculiar fascination about its qualities and he wanted to be certain when Parmelia's copy was entirely faded, assuming that both copies worked alike. Next day, the last period in the photographical week, he often paused with the hair tonic bottle aloft and blinked vacantly. In the middle of the afternoon he looked ghastly pale and felt entirely unresponsible. He complained that he was ill, which nobody denied, and went home two hours early with a scowl from the proprietor, who operated Chair No. 1.

Rushing into the disordered room, Cassius seized the picture from the table. The card was a blank. All of him was gone. The torture suddenly snapped and through his nervous little body there rushed a cool stream of remorse. He was aware of an intense redawning of love for

Parmelia. He slept from weariness and when he awoke it was early evening. He turned on the light and gazed into the mirror.

"You're not over-smart, Cassius," asserted the reflection.

A North End car picked him up and took him through the various stratas of the city, and finally to the dark factory stratum of hammocks and love and smoke and toil.

Parmelia was on the porch tonight and when he came up on the steps she spoke the absolute truth when she said she was startled.

"Cassius!" she said, with an unmistakable note of joy.

He was too ashamed and bewildered to be anything but mumbling in his reply. He seated himself in the rocker and Parmelia sat beside him. Her hand came to the arm of the chair—and into Cassius' hand.

"I haven't done right, have I?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "you should have come to me much more quickly."

"But the photo, where is that?" he inquired weakly.

"The photo?" she questioned.

"Yes," he explained, entirely mystified, "the one I gave you, where is it?" She was regarding it as a trifle. He didn't comprehend.

"Oh, I hate to tell you that," she replied, puzzling him still more.

"But is it gone," he insisted, "the nose and the chin?"

"No, silly, I didn't mutilate it as much as that."

"Mutilate?" He was exasperated.

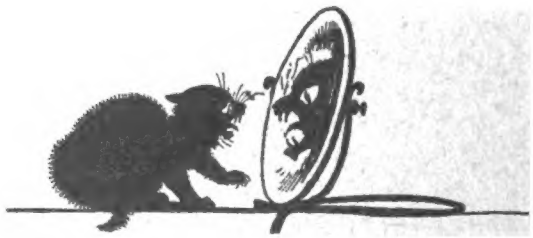
As an answer, she had drawn from somewhere a huge, old-fashioned locket. "There, if you've got to know," she explained tartly, "I clipped out just the face and put it in mother's old locket."

"And it hasn't been exposed," he inquired anxiously, "exposed to the light?"

Into her mind there floated an inspiration. It was sentimental, but it was inspirational: "It has been exposed only to the light of love."

Then he felt it coming, surging, swelling, pressing upward—a great tingling which crept through his whole body and spilled radiance into all the cells of his brain— his third original idea.

"In such a light," he said, "it can never, never fade."



Loisel Humbert

BY ROBERTA LITTLEHALE

Did you ever experience that eery feeling of depression of "coming events that cast their shadows before? If not, you will surely feel those "icy trickles" down your spine when you read about this heroine.

TWO brothers and a sister lived alone in a house their father had left them in the Carpathian Hills. It was a big, thin boarded house that had served its pioneer days as an inn. It had sheltered the country's celebraties from its robber kings to its teamsters, but its joints had loosened and it now shared the quieter life of its neighbors.

The brothers were long, bony, vigorous men, who plowed well when they plowed, but drank more to the manner when they drank. Men whose lives might have been successful after the fashion of other men of their time, but who preferred their fields in crop or out, and their liquor on tap.

Grown up in this atmosphere, the sister, who was now a woman, displayed a subjection foreign to the strength of her free physique and clear eye. Therefore she acquiesced without protest when she was told one day in autumn of the year 17— that business called her brothers thirty miles away, and that she must stay alone that night in the big loose-jointed house, many miles from a neighboring farm. They should be away a night and a day, and she watched them mount their mules with a sickening sense of despair.

As the day wore on and twilight closed in over the hills, Loisel Humbert knew fear for the first time—a strange fear—a fear of the dark and solitude and the creaking rat-haunted house.

She went out to the stables and cared for the stock. She climbed the loft and tossed down the sweet hay, but still that depressing sense of foreboding haunted her. She hurried from stall to stall, caressing the animals with a trembling hand. She sat huddled up on her milking stool with wide, startled eyes and a throat parching dry.

A knowledge of the foot-bridge she must cross from the corral to the house brought on alarm, terrifying and strange. She lighted a lantern and crossed the enclosure with swift strides that sent her shadow breaking among the barns and toward the trees.

The farm dog leaped at her shoulders with joyful baying when she reached the house, and she held his huge head against her beating heart. Loisel Humbert was shocked that she should know this sense of suffocation and fear. She threw it off with a mighty effort and went alone into the house, leaving the dog to wag his tail forlornly in the darkness. She fastened the doors and hurried to the windows. She was conscious for the first time that the small dingy panes

were without curtains and the sashes knew no locks.

She went into the kitchen and threw great logs on the fireplace, and blew till the sparks raced up the chimney and the roar of the fire took the chill from her blood.

"I must eat. It is because I am faint that I shiver so," she murmured audibly. And when the scent of the coffee filled the room and the candle-light danced on the copper and tin she ate her meat and bread laughing that the devil had tricked her so.

And though the wind rose with the moon and wailed down the chimney she knitted in her chair by the fire and forgot that the face of the clock had made all her world.

Of a sudden her needles dropped. She sat stiff—bolt upright in her chair, with her eyes staring fixed toward the door. Yes—it was a step! Her tongue parched in her mouth. "I am the sister of brave men," she thought.

Someone shook the door-knob. The loose doors rattled in their casements. A fist fell hard on the panels and a voice called "Open"—a voice that seemed to shake the leaves of the forest.

Loisel would open the door, otherwise he could break it down with a blow. She would tell him of one brother gone, but the other, indisposed, was in his room above. The stranger must be quiet. Her brother was big—a giant man—if he were disturbed there would be all the trouble of hell. Loisel staggered to the door and threw it open. She held a candle aloft in her young strong arm and the light fell over two men, one a young man, a fair man of the North, with wine-warmed skin and steel blue eyes. The other, a man of the South, old in years, well fed, with a bold eye and a monster form.

They stepped into the room, bringing the air of the windy moon-soaked night.

They called for food and wine. They threw off their hats and tossed their gloves on the table, drawing up chairs to the cheer of the fire. Sticking their great boots into the ashes they trolled out a song—a drinking song—and made the chorus all oaths in their emphasis for liquor.

Loisel stood behind them, straight as the young trees in the woods, the sap in her veins sluggish with fright, her mind pursued with horrible and surprising images.

"My brother is asleep overhead. Take care not to wake him."

They laughed till the rafters of the garret roof rattled.

"Your brothers are astride mules in the rocks of the mountains. Peace to their bones and rest to their ashes."

Loisel stood motionless, upright, thinking, and her heart began to beat furiously.

"Nevertheless, my brother is asleep overhead," she managed to say.

Then she spread their table with the food she found in her cupboard and put bottles at their elbows and rolled a cask on the floor.

They talked—the one in a big voice, the other in a small. Their stories were of their adventures, of their deeds of daring, of their loves. They drank with their lips on the glass and their eyes on the girl. They grew gayer. What a fair one she was!

With a toast to her eyes and a glass for her lips and a bottle for her hands that should fill their pipes.

Her knees vibrating with fear, her heart knocking against her breast, she thrust the tobacco into the black-mouthed pipes. The flame of the taper she held to the bowls lit up her face, white with terror. And terrified, confused, she heard their words. They would carry her off to the sun of the South, to melt the ice that chilled her blood.

She stood transfixed. She must reflect. Shades of the saints! There was no help near. She was alone. The upper house was as empty as a wind-swept tomb.

The men scraped their great boots under the table and laughed aloud. They called for cards.

"Bring down your brother, white-livered one; he shall lift you on the horse of him who wins."

She was to be gambled for. The hot eyes of the old man and the hard eyes of the young, met in the flash of challenge and desire.

The wind lifted the shingles on the roof and swept the tree branches with shrieks across them. The logs in the fireplace fell to white ashes. The heat of the liquor ran in their blood. They cleared the table with wide sweeps of their arms, scattering pewter and glass over the floor.

Of a sudden the girl felt her heart swell with fury. Was she mad to let herself be struck down by fear? She darted for a corner. There was an old gun, the butt end rubbed shiny against her brothers' coats. But the young man had his arms about her. He laughed till the veins ran full in his face. "Tricky! Thou art double-deared now," he roared.

They tied her strong hands behind her back, and lashed her to the loom that stood in the corner. Against the black wood she had the terror-stricken hollow whiteness of death.

The cards were dealt with oaths. They fell on the table like death on her heart and she opened her mouth for the breath her nostrils refused her.

They played in the beginning with the joy of it running free, and her ears rang with the lusty vigor of their contest. But the games fell even across the board and challenged, afire, they played faster, more furiously.

The young man got on his feet, his fair skin flaming. He leaned over the table, vehement, throwing his cards with a fury.

The older man sat quiet, his great face immobile, but for the eyes that flashed to the girl in a domination of his purpose. He played with consideration of his purpose, laying his cards out slowly, with care.

"Devil of a senior," the young man cried, "the men will be home again, and the girl at their backs."

Strangling, suffocating in her frenzy, Loisel Humbert hung by the rope on her arms.

The hours slipped, and the game ran point to point. Her tortured mind went over again and again the rocky, chasm-jogged road her brothers were travelling.

Suddenly she felt a silence in the room—that imperceptible second of time that reveals all things to the spirit before word comes.

The fair man swore a great oath

from between his white teeth. She saw the other kick aside the barrel and get on his feet. Huge, revolting, he turned toward her, his lips stretching in the maudlin smile of his luck and his drink. He threw out his enormous arms.

"Won—by the dogs, my pretty."

With the desperation of the hopeless, she looked up. She opened her lips to call again on the name of her brother. As she stood, there fell from above, onto her face, something moist and thick, a warm something that stopped her heart.

And the men with the drink-fire gone and its weakness settling, saw against her ghastly cheek a bright red blot—a blood spot.

Transfixed, they cast their eyes above, and from the blackened, time-eaten rafters there fell another drop, and yet another.

Then from overhead a step, measured and concealing, one dragging ghostly step, and then the fathomless seconds of silence that eat out the years of life.

Stiff with a horror that raised her hair, Loisel could have cast herself on the breasts of those base, abhorrent ones. Her arms were tied. Her feet were bound.

Then one man tottered at the shoulders of the other. With falling cheek and bulging eyes they wavered. Like the rush of wind from an open door they swept by her. They were gone. The iron ring of their horses' hoofs came from the road-side.

Loisel hung there alone with the fireless dawn over the bottles and cash and cards and pewter. On her cheek a spot whose congealing contracted her firm fair skin; overhead, a something that spun in her brain till the whirlwind of the motion brought blackness and peace.

When she opened her eyes to the world again, from the dim uncertain distance, a head came nearer, a brother's head, whose ruggedness was pale with the shock and whose right arm hung limp, broken and bleeding.

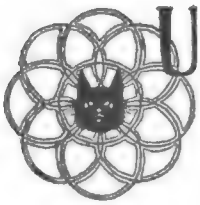
She was on her bed and she watched his lips. She heard of his accident—his disaster. His horse had reared suddenly on a rocky grade, and he had thrown himself off to avoid death on the boulders below. Returning alone to her, he had crept from the hill to the upper chamber. He had crept softly because of his weakness from loss of blood. He had hoped to alarm her less when she awoke in the morning, but he had sunk, fainting, on his knees, when the rush of the men below roused him.

And together they rested in each other's strong arms. Again and again the awful thought occurred to each of his helplessness in the danger, if, broken and bleeding, he had come to her below instead of crawling in above, where fate guided his life-blood to her up-turned waiting face.

The Purloined Potato Bug

BY THOMAS H. POTTER

One of our readers handed in this story, marked "Full of fun—a gem!" To hint at its delicate humor would spoil a treat for you. Dip in!



UNCLE PHILETUS SHERMAN held a kerosene lamp in a tired, but faithful hand, while his nephew, J. Emory Farnsworth, packed little boxes into the depths of an enormous trunk. The little boxes contained many insects, living and dead, of varying degrees of unpopularity with average human beings. To J. Emory they were specimens for the entomological laboratory, but to Uncle Philetus they were just bugs, and from this radical difference in viewpoint came the sigh that heaved upward from the very waistband of Uncle Philetus's trousers as he shifted the lamp from one patient hand to the other. The bugs had almost come between him and his favorite nephew.

The horn-spectacled and incongruously tanned face of J. Emory bobbed up from the trunk. When Uncle Philetus looked into the eager and youthful eyes of his nephew, memories of beetles in his smoking tobacco, and caterpillars on the breakfast table vanished. Earnest youth is likeable—even when it collects bugs.

"By Jove!" exclaimed J. Emory, in a tone of deep concern, "I knew there was something missing from my collection of indigenous coleoptera—and mighty little chance to do anything about it before the morning train!"

"Well now, ain't that too bad!"

"Uncle Phlete, I've simply got to have a few specimens of the Leptinotarsus decemlineatus!"

"Lordy!" Uncle Philetus confined himself to one word and waited to see just how serious his nephew was. The name alone was enough to discourage a tired man.

"It's the common potato bug," explained J. Emory. "Couldn't we get some to-night?"

"We might," conceded his uncle with a distinct feeling of relief that it was not some rare and far-dwelling butterfly. "It's darker 'n a stack o' black cats outdoors, an' ye know I didn't plant no potaters this year, but I'll scoot over into Cap'n Pangborn's garden an' see what I can do."

Uncle Philetus went out the back way. Dim starlight outlined the cottage of his lifelong friend and crony, Captain Uriah Pangborn, and revealed in silhouette the low fence that divided the two gardens. The old man picked a careful way through his own corn and tomatoes and swung a rather clumsy leg over the top board. There was a sudden, ripping sound, and for the dozenth time since the visit of J. Emory Farnsworth to the village of Wadhams, a good Congregationalist said things that would have sent

the pale eyes of the Rev. Elmer Baldwin rolling heavenward. Philetus Sherman had torn his second best pants.

Harassed by the corpulence that advancing years and a placid disposition had conferred upon him, Uncle Philetus groaned as he passed his hands over the leaves of bush after bush without locating a single beetle. He dug into his pockets for matches, but it was not until the last match had burned down to his suffering fingers that he found one of the striped pests. With the bug ineffectually wriggling against the palm of his closed hand, he went back to the waiting J. Emory.

"One of the most interesting of the chrysomelid beetles," remarked the young man as he inspected his new captive. "I wanted at least half a dozen."

Uncle Philetus opened his mouth to reply, thought better of it, and grunted. After all, J. Emory was his own sister's child, he thought, and it was so long after the regular village bedtime that he might be feeling a little irritable. The old man retired to his bachelor chamber and was asleep almost before he had his nightshirt on.

Restored in mind and body, Uncle Philetus called J. Emory to a smoking breakfast the following morning in plenty of time for the young man to connect with Aunt Tom Dick, who had been for more than a generation the carrier of mail and passengers to the railroad station, two miles away. As they ate, there came signs of great activity from the Pangborn household where the captain, more or less fortunate than his friend, was looked after by an old maid sister, Mary Ann. Doors slammed, dishes rattled, and the shrill voice of Mary Ann, accompanied by the gruff barks of Captain Uriah, issued from open windows.

" 'Tain't time fer 'em to be up, an' something's the matter," said Philetus, with conviction, "but they ain't sick. If the cap'n was sick, he'd holler so they'd hear him clear to Westport, an' if Mary Ann was sick, he'd be so scairt he'd come runnin' over here fer help."

"Maybe he's missed that potato bug you stole," laughed J. Emory.

"Great Jehosophat!" exclaimed his uncle. "He'd laugh his old head off, an' if folks gen'rally knowed we'd ben gatherin' up bugs fer two weeks they'd think we was crazy."

Before J. Emory could begin one of his dissertations on the relation of science to ignorance, the rattle of Aunt Tom Dick's unmistakable buckboard sounded from the highway and the two men hurried to stagger out with the big trunk between them. While the down on Aunt Tom's ancient chin was still a-quiver with the excitement of a sure-pay passenger, the Pangborn's front door was flung open and Mary Ann, clad in her best black silk and clutching a small leather handbag, hurried out.

"Travellin' er goin' somewhere?" asked Uncle Philetus, lightly.

Mary Ann was in no mood for badinage.

"Land sakes!" she puffed. "I should think I was! Uncle Dan'l Mather's oldest gal is took with somethin' down in Ticonderogy, where she's ben a-teachin'. The telegraft

sayin' so come last night an' I was up till all hours fixin' Uriah up so he won't starve to death. Ain't fit to take care of hisself! Goodness gracious, I'm flustered!"

"Well now, ain't that too bad!" exclaimed Uncle Philetus as he tucked Mary Ann's black silk out of the way of the wheels. He was sorry for Daniel Mather's girl, but that did not damp his good spirits as Aunt Tom clucked and pushed on the reins. The bugs were on their way to New York and J. Emory was off to other bug hunting fields, the location of which Philetus had not taken the trouble to learn.

As the old man walked buoyantly around his house toward the back door, he saw Captain Uriah standing in the middle of his own garden, chewing excitedly on his quid of fine-cut and nervously fingering his cane. He regarded Philetus with a fixed and peculiar stare.

"Mornin', Cap'n!"

To the amazement of Philetus Sherman, there was no answer. He walked over to the fence, assuring himself that Uriah must be playing some kind of a joke, and remarked facetiously:

"Ain't struck dumb, be ye, by bein' left without a woman to look after ye?"

Still no answer. Captain Pangborn's stare was plainly malevolent. His very whiskers seemed to bristle.

"What's the matter of ye, Uriah?"

The veteran pointed to his tomato plants, standing up bravely, but denuded of every tomato, green and red, and cried in a voice that trembled with rage:

"Why in tarnation didn't ye say ye wanted them tomaters, 'stead of sneakin' in here an' stealing 'em when ye thought I was to sleep?"

"W-which?"

"Tomaters! Tomaters!" yelled the infuriated captain. "Ain't deef, be ye?"

"I ain't stole—" began Uncle Philetus. Captain Pangborn cut him short.

"Yas, ye did, too! I see ye with my own eyes lightin' matches an' trampin' 'round in my garden last night, but I didn't know what ye was up to! Ye needn't 'a ben a hog an' took 'em all!"

"I didn't take yer tomaters!"

The captain snorted.

"Mebbe ye'll tell me next that ye wa'n't in here at all last night!"

Philetus reflected quickly. It was no time to explain that he had been hunting for potato bugs by match-light. He must gain time to think.

"Uriah, I ain't never stole nothin' in my hull life an' I ain't a-goin' to begin now," he said, solemnly.

"Ye're a durned good Congregationalist, ain't ye?" retorted the captain, sarcastically "Fust off ye steal, an' then ye lie about it!"

"Uriah, ain't we allus ben friends?"

"We ain't now!"

"Ye're makin' a big mistake!"

Apparently the captain wavered for a moment.

"I can't see what ye wanted to do it fer, when ye got tomaters of yer own," he said, "but if ye'll come right out an' admit ye stole mine, we'll call it square an' say nothin' more about it."

"I can't, when I didn't!" replied

Philetus, with some heat.

"Did, too!" shouted Captain Uriah, his anger boiling up again. "I picked up the match stubs ye dropped!"

"I didn't steal—"

"Ye did!"

"I didn't!"

Captain Pangborn, lean and acidulous from years of dyspepsia and Mary Ann, danced in his wrath and flourished his cane.

"Yew an' me ends right here an' now!" he yelled. "If ye step foot on my land agin ye'll git a charge o' birdshot in yer legs!"

Uncle Philetus, more stunned and hurt than angry, turned abruptly and went into his house, leaving the captain sputtering and mumbling among his despoiled plants.

"Lordy!" sighed the old man as he went absent-mindedly about his delayed housework. "That potater bug has got me into a reg'lar puppy-snatch!"

Who had taken the captain's tomatoes, anyway? If they had been grapes or muskmelons, the red-headed Talcott boy or any other village youngster might have been responsible, but the boys did not steal tomatoes. A hungry man, if there had been one among Wadhams' five hundred inhabitants, would have stolen potatoes or corn, or something filling. It couldn't have been a joke, because there was no point to it. Captain Pangborn didn't have any enemies. Nothing like this thing had ever happened before in Wadhams.

So deep was Uncle Philetus in his cogitations over the mystery of the stolen tomatoes that it came time for the noon mail almost before he realized that the morning had gone. He hurriedly clapped on his straw hat and started for Charley Sprague's general store and post office, for nothing short of death or disability ever kept the unoccupied males of Wadhams away from the biggest event of the day.

As Philetus approached the store he noted that the steps were more than usually crowded, and he noted with a vague feeling of uneasiness that the gathering turned its eyes, as one man, upon him. Charley Sprague stopped sorting the mail and peered out of a window. A dozen gossiping tongues became silent.

"Got any tomaters to sell?"

"Huh?" Uncle Philetus stopped, uncertain whether the question had been meant for him.

"Heerd yew an' Captain Pangborn was goin' into the tomater raisin' business together!"

It was Judd Dickinson, the village jester, speaking with preternatural solemnity, and his last remark was the point of the joke. Pete Washburn, his understudy, took the cue.

"Har! har! har!" he bawled, slapping his leg.

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared the gathering on the steps.

Before the victim could gather himself for rejoinder, Captain Pangborn jumped up from an obscure corner.

"This ain't no joke, by Godfrey!" he shouted, shaking his cane belligerently first at Judd and then at Philetus. He stumped down the steps and set his face toward home, while the porch rocked with laughter.

"Must be ye're goin' to make a lot o' ketchup this summer," remarked

Judd to Uncle Philetus with an elaborate assumption of grave interest.

With the laughter from this sally ringing in his ears, the old man suddenly realized what had happened. Captain Uriah, his friend, neighbor and fellow church member, had publicly accused him of theft! He felt alternate hot and cold waves sweeping over him.

"Goin' to bottle yer ketchup fer sale, er save it fer yer own fambly?" demanded Judd. That was wit, par excellence, for of course, Uncle Philetus, being a bachelor, did not have any family. The store steppers held their sides and bellowed with joy. Tears were streaming down the sallow cheeks of Charley Sprague, who had abandoned all pretense of work.

"I didn't steal no tomaters!" cried Uncle Philetus, making himself heard as the guffaws died away. "It was a potater bug—that's what I was after! I only took one potater bug, an'—"

"What say?" Dickinson leaned forward and the mood of the gathering changed from mirth to amazement.

"I say, I wanted a potater bug—that is, J. Emory, he wanted a bug an' so—"

"Don't ye know a potater bug's awful rambunctious after dark?" asked Judd soberly. "Takes a brave man to go huntin' potater bugs at night!"

This time the store porch outdid itself. It whooped its appreciation, for Judd had never been in any better form, and Philetus' efforts to explain were mere openings and shuttings of the mouth. Words came out, but they were lost in the hurricane of sound. He turned, finally, his shoulders sagging, and stumbled toward home.

"Don't wanta buy a good potater bug houn' fer huntin', do ye?" shouted Pete Washburn.

The old man did not turn. The familiar buildings seemed swimming about him and the road was uncertain under his feet. Once in the shelter of his own home he put his empty pipe in his mouth and sat down to think.

In less than half a day, Philetus Sherman, the respected equal of the Rev. Elmer Baldwin and Judge Winthrop Daniels, had become a village joke, target for Judd Dickinson. He might vindicate himself, but how? It would be days, and even weeks, before he could locate J. Emory and get a satisfactory statement from him. And even then, he would still stand accused of petty theft. Long shadows came into the kitchen where Uncle Philetus communed with himself, and then darkness filled the room, but he sat immovable with the stem of his empty pipe gripped between his teeth.

It was late the next morning when Philetus Sherman opened the back door to get a handful of kindling for his breakfast fire. He stopped on the threshold and stiffened with astonishment. A big pile of tomato plants completely hid the doorstep. Red and green tomatoes gleamed through the mass of leaves and stalks. Hardly believing his eyes, Philetus stooped, picked up one of the plants and saw that it had been neatly sliced, undoubtedly with a knife. He hurried

but I kin show ye the tomater plants piled up on the doorstep. I knowed enough 'bout law to know the crime ought to be left the way it was committed."

Judge Daniels leaned back in his chair, fitted the ends of his fingers together and peered over his glasses.

"Thought an' knowed is two different things under the law," he rumbled in his best court manner. "We have the *corpus delicti* in the person of these here tomater plants, the same showing the *modus operandi* of the criminal, but the motive, as you have stated it, would not be sufficient to establish in a court of law that the person whom you have accused did wilfully and with malice prepense commit the alleged crime."

The justice's Latin was as puzzling to Uncle Philetus as the scientific name for the common potato bug, but he gathered the meaning of the legal luminary's remarks and his gorge rose.

"Do ye mean to tell me, Winthrop Daniels, that I can't git no satisfaction fer this here outrage?" he cried. "I'm a man of peace an' a good Congregationalist, but, by the Great Horn Spoon, if the law won't help me, I'll help myself!"

"Now ye're a-layin' yerself open to grave suspicions in case anything should happen to the person er property of Captain Uriah Pangborn," enunciated Judge Daniels, solemnly. "I want to warn ye that anything ye say may be used against ye! Ye better be thankful the captain don't start criminal perceedin's fer robbin' an' despoilin' his garden."

"Ye don't believe that, Jedge!" exclaimed Uncle Philetus. "Why, I went into his garden after a potater bug fer J. Emory!"

"Wouldn't it of ben better to let the story go the way the captain told it?" asked Judge Daniels. "Did ye figger that folks would believe potater bugs was important enough to be took up by science? Scurse bugs is what scientists is after! Ye ought to of made it hummin' birds, Philetus!"

There wasn't any use in saying anything more. Philetus Sherman arose with a grim resolution forming in his mind.

"Much obleeged to ye, Jedge, fer what ye ain't helped me," he said. "What's the damage?"

"The reg'lar consultin' fee in a case like this ought to be 'bout fifty cents," answered the justice, scratching his chin, "but I guess I'll feel easier if I don't charge ye nothin'."

Uncle Philetus stalked toward home, his shoulders thrown back and his head high, but he did not turn in at his own dooryard. A glance told him that the store porch coterie had gathered for the noon mail, but he stopped in front of Captain Uriah's cottage and turned his back on the public. He had got beyond the point where the shafts of a village joker mattered.

The old man took off his Sunday coat, folded it carefully and laid it down on the sidewalk. Then he picked up a good sized stone and heaved it with certain aim against the Pangborn front door. In less than five seconds Captain Uriah, his jaw working wrathfully, stood in the doorway. He stared at the shirt sleeved figure on the sidewalk.

"Got sand enough to come out in the road and fight like a man, ye old reperbate?" Uncle Philetus shouted.

"Ye're durned right I have!" yelled the captain. "Yew jest wait till I git a fresh chaw of tobacker an' I'll knock the tar out of ye!"

As the captain reached for his tobacco, Uncle Philetus threw a glance over his shoulder. Charley Sprague, followed by lesser citizens, was coming at a dog trot. Philetus whirled to face the crowd and Sprague stopped at a respectful distance. The others drew up behind him. Captain Pangborn, his whiskers sticking straight out and his arms swinging, was getting ready to charge.

"Whoa-a-a!" drawled the unmistakable voice of Aunt Tom Dick almost in Uncle Philetus' ear. He changed front again and put his back against the fence that divided his yard from the Pangborn's. Mary Ann Pangborn was climbing out of the decrepit buckboard.

"What air yew two old fools a-doin'?" she demanded.

"He stole my tomaters!" yelled the captain, pointing at Uncle Philetus.

"He's a liar! He chopped mine down last night!" shouted Philetus.

"Wal, I don't know nothin' 'bout yer tomaters, Phlete Sherman," said Mary Ann, "but I picked all of Uriah's yes'day mornin' an' took 'em down to Uncle Dan'l Mather's gal!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the captain feebly.

"Ye can't 'oh' me!" cried Uncle Philetus. "I—"

He stopped, for Aunt Tom Dick had shoved a quavering hand almost under his nose and in it was a yellow envelope. "Here's a telegraft fer ye," she squeaked. "Ain't no charges."

He tore it open and stared stupidly at the scrawled words for a moment. Then he waved it in the air and shook it in the faces of the crowd.

"Here's a telegraft from my nephew, J. Emory Farnsworth," he shouted, "an' he says, 'Git me six more potater bugs from Captain Pangborn's garden an' forward by parcel post!' Read it yerself, ye one hoss lawyer!"

Philetus Sherman rolled the telegram into a ball and threw it directly into the left eye of Judge Winthrop Daniels. He turned and glared at his enemy, Captain Uriah.

"Phlete, I'm mighty sorry—" began the veteran.

"That ain't goin' to put back my tomater plants!"

"I didn't cut 'em down, honest to goodness, Phlete!"

"Did, too!" barked Uncle Philetus.

Captain Uriah Pangborn was silent. The crowd growled. Even Mary Ann looked at him with an accusing eye. Then from a humble source came a surprise.

"Judd Dickinson cut down Uncle Philetus' tomater plants fer a joke!" piped up the red-headed Talcott boy. "Him an' Pete Washburn jest sneaked off."

Uncle Philetus, his blue eyes suddenly mild again, turned to his lifelong friend and offered his hand.

"Uriah, I apologize!" he said.

"Ye don't need to, Phlete," answered the captain. "I was feelin' so cussed spiteful I almost thought myself that I done it."

Tripe And Cats

BY WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

The ingenious brain of Eve is a greater force than any ballot ever created by man. Here is humble and comical proof.

ONDNESS for tripe may be a racial trait, an acquired characteristic or a personal idiosyncracy. It matters not. It is still true that an inordinate love for properly browned morsels of this succulent dish was the reason why Dennis Olsen was beating his wife on a bright May morning. She had burned his breakfast tripe.

Dennis was beating his wife calmly, as a man should. He held her by the back of the neck and administered alternate cuffs and remarks about the tripe with a dispassionate impartiality which bespoke rather his Scandinavian blood than his mercurial Irish strain. The din of West Forty-eighth Street, which penetrated even to the fifth floor rear tenement, obscured some of the remarks, but it mitigated none of the cuffs.

"Me tripe was burnt and me tripe was tough!" said Olsen, more in sorrow than in anger, as he flung his wife into a chair. "There is but one way to cook tripe, no matter what the Dutch and the Dagoes may tell ye. Soak it over night, bile it till it's tender, and then fry it in hot fat to the color of a mild seegar!"

"Yes, Denny," sniffled Mrs. Olsen. "I done all that and I only burnt one piece!"

"A piece of tripe is a piece of tripe," announced Dennis, pointing a warning finger at his wife. "What with me out of work going on six weeks there's no tripe to be wasted, Nora! I want tripe fer breakfast and tripe fer supper, Nora, and if there's one piece spiled I hate to think of the beating I'll give ye!"

"Yes, Denny!"

That repeated "Yes" irritated Olsen, as it will when a man's wife agrees with him too meekly. His florid brow wrinkled in a frown and he advanced with one capable hand raised. Mrs. Olsen winced, but that blow never fell for from behind her husband came a long-drawn, plaintive cry.

"Me-awr-r-r!"

Olsen jumped and his face turned the color of an uncooked piece of tripe as he whirled around. On the window sill behind him was a large, bristling, yellow-eyed Angora cat.

"The saints preserve us!" whispered Dennis, as he backed toward the cook stove. "There's that banshee agin!"

Mrs. Olsen opened her eyes. Her husband, edging farther and farther away from the window, came in contact with the hot stove about at the mid-section of his being. He leaped forward with a yell of earnest woe and the cat disappeared over the window ledge and down the fire escape.

Perspiration broke out profusely on Dennis's forehead.

"That's twice since daylight and three times during the night that critter's been trying to come in here," he said, unsteadily. "Never a cat like that have I seen on Forty-eighth Street, Nora! 'Tis the work of the Evil One himself!"

"Yes, Denny."

This time acquiescence failed to rouse the ire of Mr. Olsen. He had a pain and a plethora of thought to occupy his attention. As he rubbed the pain and scratched his head he meditated aloud.

"I've seen tiger cats, and three-colored cats, and bob-tailed cats, but never till this day have I seen a cat with blue hair as long as a goat's and eyes the color of an eggnog. The critter is no cat!"

"Sure it's a cat, Denny," said Mrs. Olsen. "Would ye believe in an elephant if you'd never seen one?"

"I would, fer I'm a man of intelligence," replied Dennis as he rinsed out the beer bucket. "It's not fer the likes of you to be contradicting yer husband, Nora, or mebbe he'll give ye another beating."

Mr. Olsen took ten cents from the flat family pocketbook and went out on his usual after-breakfast errand. He was good for two "pints" before dinner and three between dinner and supper. The number thereafter would vary inversely to the square of his grouch. Mrs. Olsen sighed. If Dennis didn't stop waiting for another job to come to him she knew that the Charity Organization Society would have a new case to investigate before many days.

The cat was an added trouble for although its direct effect was on Mr. Olsen, his wife got the recoil. Three times in the night the yellow-eyed, blue-haired animal had penetrated to the second and sleeping room of their apartment, and three times Dennis had arisen in his wrath and hurled shoes until the supply gave out. Before breakfast, during breakfast, and after, the cat had reappeared via the fire-escape and now Dennis Olsen was a shaken man. Mrs. Olsen felt the jar.

As for herself, the cat was a surprise, but it had no effect on her nerves. Nora Olsen would have accepted a pink cat with green stripes in the same spirit; ten years of married life had furnished her with so many shocks, spiritual and physical. A cat was a cat to her, and black eyes would have been as common by any other name. She put the day's supply of tripe on to parboil as the clump of her husband's footsteps sounded on the stairs.

The first glass of beer disappeared at a gulp. The second went more slowly and Mr. Olsen rested his elbow on the kitchen table and regarded his wife with a very nearly tolerant look as he sipped the third glass. His puckered features smoothed themselves out. The breeze from the open window at his back was soothing.

"I've been thinking, Nora," he said, as he drained the pail into his glass, "that I'd have tripe fer dinner too. Three times a day is not too often to eat a dish like tripe."

"'Tis well ye spoke, Denny," answered Mrs. Olsen. "I was planning to have some fried potaties."

"Fried potaties is all right fer the

Irish," remarked her lord, forgetting one whole half of his ancestry, "but the strong an' warlike race of Swedes needs meat."

Three things had happened to Nora Olsen. She had been deprived of her beloved potatoes, for besides bread and tea they could afford but one dish; she had been forced to three meals of tripe in a single day, when two was the limit of her endurance, and she had been constrained to endure an insult to the Irish. It was for three reasons, then, that she said not a word when she saw the big, blue cat hop on to the window ledge and reach a tentative foot toward the kitchen table on which Olsen lolled, all unconscious of his doom.

Dennis leaned on the table with his back to the window and the cat put forward first one foot and then another until it stood, unrebuked, with its whiskers almost brushing his ear.

"A potatie eating race like the Irish is to be pitied, Nora, but—"

"Me-aw-r-r-r!"

Dennis Olsen never went through space any faster, not even when he was blown up in the subway, than he did that instant. He stopped because of the sink. It was in the way. As he gripped its greasy sides and started back at the table, the blue cat straightened its tail up in the air, opened its mouth and again said:

"Me-aw-r-r-r!"

"'Tis the soul of some poor devil I've had ructions with, Nora," whispered Olsen. "Heaven send they's some way to appease him!"

Mrs. Olsen raised her arm and a skillet hurtled through the air. It missed, by the fraction of an inch, and passed across Dennis's line of vision between him and the cat. That animal took the hint and in a flash there was no cat.

"Did ye see that, Nora?" demanded Olsen, hoarsely, gripping his wife by the arm. "The frying pan went clean through the critter and he went off in a cloud of smoke!"

The glimmering of an idea came to Nora. She realized why it had seemed to her husband that the skillet had gone through the cat, but his imagination had conjured up the smoke and here, at last, was something between heaven and earth that scared him. It ought to be useful.

"There's no telling what's the meaning of this, Denny," she said solemnly. "They's things mortals don't understand at all."

Olsen went to the family pocketbook and, with a trembling hand, extracted another dime.

"Drink won't be after helping ye to keep that banshee off, Dennis Olsen!" Nora caught her breath the moment the words were spoken for it was the first time she had ever dared advice.

"Nora, I'm a sick man and I need it!" His tone was almost pleading. "Let a sick man have his whim, Nora!"

Although Dennis went out with the beer pail and the dime, his wife thrilled with a new emotion. She had dared a protest and it had gone unrebuked. The day before, temerity like that would have cost her a pair of black eyes. She had a distinct feeling of friendliness for the strange cat.

It was near dinner time and the

odor of frying tripe filled the two rooms when Olsen came back. The potency of something more than beer lent a gleam to his eye and a rolling motion to his walk. He set the beer pail down on the table with his old, accustomed emphasis.

"Me dinner," he commanded, "and be quick about it!"

Out of the tail of her eye Nora saw that the effect of the blue cat had somewhat worn off but, on the other hand, Dennis was in a frame of mind extremely susceptible to things of the imagination. He turned out a glass of beer.

"Me dinner, woman!" with a thump that slopped the beer.

For the first time in ten years Mrs. Olsen failed to say "Yes, Denny," to a command and for the first time she delayed to obey. She was waiting and hoping, with an eye on the window. Suddenly her face brightened. she forked three pieces of tripe, burned to a crisp, onto a plate and slammed it down before her husband.

"There's yer dinner, Denny Olsen!" Nora's hands were on her hips and her chin was thrust forward. Her husband looked at her in astonishment and then his face grew dark with anger.

"Burnt tripe!" he roared. "And you a-tellin' me to eat it! So ye think ye can talk back to me, do ye?"

Olsen half rose from his chair. Then his wife stretched out one arm and silently pointed toward the window. The glaring yellow eyes and the head of the blue cat looked over the sill. Dennis sank back with a gurgle.

"Take it away, Nora!" he begged, weakly waving one arm. "Take it away and I'll say no more about the tripe and I'll not beat ye this time!"

Mrs. Olsen swung her body forward, as though to take a step, with her eyes on the cat. That animal dropped back on its haunches and sat on the fire escape, out of Dennis's sight. He pulled his eyes away from the window sill and reached for his beer.

"Shut the winder, Nora, that's a good girl," he said, after a deep draught. "If the critter can walk through glass then I'll know me time's come, sure enough!"

Nora closed the window. Then she put bread and tea and three more pieces of tripe, unburnt, before her husband. As she opened the door into the hall Olsen partially recovered himself.

"Where now?" he demanded. Mrs. Olsen swung around and fixed him with a hard stare.

"None of your business!" she said, with a significant glance toward the window. Dennis subsided, muttering, and poured another tumbler of beer.

Nora Olsen tripped downstairs with a light step. She even hummed a lilting tune as she threw open the door of the rooms under hers, now vacant, and went in. Out on the fire-escape she looked up and saw a long, shaggy blue tail hanging down through the strips of iron.

"Come kitty! Nice kitty!" she called softly.

The blue cat looked, switched its tail, and daintily minced down the steps. It purred. Mrs. Olsen gathered it in her arms and stroked its

ragged head until the purr rose to a song of peace and contentment.

"You darlin'!" she murmured. "'Tis the making of Denny Olsen you'll be!"

On the stairs just above her own landing Mrs. Olsen sat and waited with the cat in her arms. Time for the first pail of beer on the afternoon lap came and she heard Dennis come out and go downstairs. Then, with the song of the blue cat ever ranging higher, she ran into her rooms.

The nature of the animal abruptly changed. From a sweet-singing, fireside pet he became a raging and almost unmanageable collection of claws and teeth. It was only at the cost of half a dozen scratches that Mrs. Olsen muffled him with her apron and threw him, apron encumbered, into the coal closet. She sat down, breathing hard.

"The divil is in the critter, after all!" she exclaimed. "Small wonder Denny thinks 'tis a banshee!"

The rebellion of Nora was not to be quelled by a cat. She placed a pile of plates in the sink, convenient to hand, and laid the rolling pin side of them. Then she drew a chair within reach of the coal closet doorknob and waited.

Dennis Olsen swaggered into the room with the air that he was a freeborn American citizen. Mrs. Olsen knew at once that the burnt tripe and the banshee were at death grips for the ascendency in his mind.

"Get me a tumbler!" he ordered, as he took the cover from the beer pail. "No more of yer nonsense!"

Mrs. Olsen reached over into the sink and picked up the rolling pin. She glanced significantly at the window. Her husband, filled with his usual mid-afternoon quantity of courage, sneered.

"No cat, green, blue or yellow, ever scared Denny Olsen!" he shouted, pounding the table just a little too hard to carry conviction. "Get me a tumbler!"

For answer Nora tore open the door of the coal closet. A glaring eyed monster, blue spotted with black, whirled out in a cloud of dust and leaped to the center of the table. With a tail the size of a man's leg it arched its back and spat.

Dennis was no longer a freeborn American citizen. He was a humble suppliant to the powers that rule the world of the supernatural. Down on his knees in the farthest corner of the room he breathed what prayers he could remember, impartially to the saints and to the devil.

There was a sharp and peremptory knock at the door. Nora, assured by a glance that her husband was occupied, sprang to open it. In the hall stood a woman the like of whose mink motoring coat Nora had never seen. A galaxy of rings gleamed from one ungloved hand. Before the stranger could speak the blue cat, scenting a way to freedom, leaped from the table to Nora's shoulder and thence into the bosom of the mink coat.

"Oh, Piffle!" shrieked the strange woman, in an ecstacy of joy as she gathered the cat in her arms.

Nora Olsen was not Irish in vain. She hastily pulled the door shut behind her.

"Speak lower, if ye please, mum," she said. "Me husband's sick."

"Where did you find Piffle?" asked the stranger. "I lost him out of the car yesterday on my way to the pier and I've been inquiring from house to house all through this neighborhood!"

"He come to us, mum. It seemed almost like he was sent!"

"Doesn't it?" beamed the cat's owner. "He's Piffle III, you know—the one that took all the prizes last year."

"Yes, mum."

Suddenly Piffle made a lunge and landed at the door. He put his nose against the crack.

"Me-awr-r-r!"

"He's hungry!" cried the stranger. She sniffed the overladen air. "You've been cooking tripe! That's practically the only food that Piffle will touch!"

"Just like me husband, mum," replied Nora, edging toward the door.

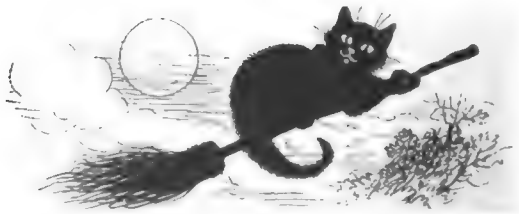
Piffle's mistress gathered him up in her arms. She thrust a ten dollar bill into Mrs. Olsen's hand.

"That's for taking such good care of my little darling," she said. "Good-by!"

Nora looked at the ten dollar bill as the steps of the stranger grew fainter on the stairs. She stuffed it into her dress and went into the kitchen.

Dennis was just reaching for the beer pail. He quailed before his wife's glance. She took the pail out of his unresisting hand and poured ten cents worth of good beer into the sink.

"Not another drop till ye get a job, Denny Olsen," she announced, firmly. "Now go out an' look fer work!"



The Irrepressible Jerry

By G. P. Wilson

An ingenious crook, a motion-picture scheme, and plenty of "nerve" furnish many amusing little incidents, with the ultimate victory for the "nerviest" one.

ONCE every year I go to New Orleans. At five o'clock in the afternoon on Mardi Gras day I go to the corner of St. Charles and Canal Streets and there I meet Jerry. I only see him annually. Our meeting has become a custom with us, as inevitable as a Mohammedan's bow towards Mecca.

Jerry is a grafter. His livelihood is gained through the ignorance of others, which he very frankly admits. I buy for him, once a year, food and wine and amusement, and in return he tells me of his experiences. It is the only case, I believe, where Jerry gives anyone their money's worth.

We had met as usual and had gone into Kolbs for refreshments. Jerry knows that if I pay the checks it is up to him to furnish the lion's share of the conversation, so he began at once.

"Getting money from the innocent as I do," he said, shifting his glance from his empty glass to a waiter, significantly, "is like making a date with a strange girl over the telephone—only more so. You've got a general idea of what's waiting for you at the other end of the wire, but you don't know for sure until the door swings open and it's too late to back out.

"She may be as pleasing to your eye as a sunny spring morning when your overcoat's in hock, or she may be a cross between a burlesque chorus girl and a police matron. Statistics favor the latter.

"Last summer I was presented with one of the sweetest propositions that I ever had the pleasure of looking over. It seemed for a while like the rainbow had planted its end in my vest pocket and all I had to do was to reach in for the bags of gold. And yet I came so near getting caged that even now I catch myself doing the lock step every once in a while and reaching out my hand for the shoulder of the man ahead of me. It's a chilly feeling, believe me."

He shuddered and looked in the direction of the waiter again. I ordered, of course.

"I had drifted into St. Louis," Jerry continued, "with ten dollars and a disposition crabbed enough to crack the Blarney Stone. Business was worse than bad. It was extinct. I had been working Southern Illinois and when a grafter can't make a raise down there, he'd better have the ivory cut out of his head and go into the billiard ball business. Outside of New York it's the richest picking we have.

"I was just ambling around town,

aimlessly, like a kid, hoping he'll find a nickel but knowing he won't, when I ran into Amos. He and I sold the Blackstone Hotel last winter to a fellow who had drifted into Chicago with a lot of loose change and an avaricious disposition. He couldn't see anything but the profit he was going to make on the deal.

"I sure was glad to see Amos. It's always gratifying to meet a business associate, especially when you're nearly broke. If Amos has a last name I don't know it, but he has of course, and I'll bet it's Money. You can always bank on him either having a stake or a pretty good idea of how to get one. He's what you'd call versatile. He's a grafter from choice, but whenever necessity butts in he'll 'stick up' a man or do a second story stunt or most anything to help out the exchequer.

" 'How's business?' he asked, after we'd given each other the 'once over.'

" 'There ain't no such word,' I says. 'The dictionary has dropped it and the newspapers ain't using it any more. It's passed out of existence along with free drinking cups and the Republican Administration.'

" 'That's what I thought,' he smiled, 'but I got a hunch yesterday morning that it's coming into vogue again. I'm the man that's going to rejuvenate it. I've got a proposition that'll make a Standard Oil dividend check look like a dun sixty days past due. We can give away public libraries or start an outlaw baseball league and still have money left to lift the mortgage on the farm. Have you got a ten you could let me have?'

"I knew it was coming just as sure as dinner time. But it startled me a little when he named the exact figure that was on the bill I had stowed away.

" 'Nothing doing,' I says. 'If my own brother wanted to borrow fifty cents and would put a mortgage on the Pennsylvania Railroad to secure it, I wouldn't lend him a quarter.'

" 'Neither would I,' he declared. 'Being a railroad man of that much prominence he wouldn't need fifty cents and I haven't got a brother anyway. This is different. It's straight business.'

" 'Uncover,' I says, 'and let's see what you've got planted.'

" 'What if I was to tell you I'd thought up a way to rob houses in broad daylight, the lighter the better, with the cop on the beat looking square at you and doing everything he could to help you out?'

" 'I'd say that some of the furniture was missing from your upper story,' I answered. 'Strange things happen, but not miracles, any more. You'd never get a cop to do that for ten dollars. They've all been educated and brains come high.'

"Amos laughed. 'I didn't want the ten to buy a cop,' he says. 'I wanted it to rent a moving picture camera.'

" 'I don't get you,' I says, wondering what he's driving at. 'Spring it all at once and stop nibbling around the edges. I'm down and out, but my health's fairly good and my system will stand one more shock.'

" 'All we have to do,' he says, 'is to locate one of the mansions in the West End, whose owner has gone away for the summer, take a moving picture camera, and while one of us

turns the crank the other, dressed like a movie burglar, opens a window and steps in. Then you move the camera around to the front of the house and pretend to photograph your partner as he comes out with the valuables swung over his shoulder in a sack. It's a cinch. They're taking pictures everywhere now and it wouldn't excite any more suspicion than a kid skipping rope.'

"'It sounds good,' I says. 'I believe it's all right if it hasn't been worked too often. Who put you next?'

"'I'm the originator,' he answered, 'and I think I'll have the idea copyrighted. I've picked out a house in West Moreland Place and I know a fence down on Market Street that'll rent us a camera for five dollars. We'll have to use the other five to rent an automobile. I wanted to pull it off tomorrow morning, but as we're broke, I guess we'll have to wait until we can make a stake some other way.'

"'I know a man here that'll stand for a touch,' I says, thinking of the money I had stored away for emergencies. 'He's an awful good friend of mine, a very particular friend, and I'm satisfied he'll let me have a ten. But before I go to him let's get this deal fixed up satisfactory to me and you. Who's going to pull the John Bunny end of this venture and who's going to turn the crank?'

"'Why I'll operate the machine of course,' says Amos, just as if it had been fore-ordained years ago and there wasn't any getting around it. 'It takes science to run one of those machines and besides, you look more like a burglar than I do.'

"'If I do,' I says, 'burglars have changed considerably since I saw one last. I've led a varied career, I'll admit, but I ain't never posed before a camera but once. At that unfortunate time they took two views, front and profile, and then put numbers under them and filed them away.

"'Now don't think I'm above breaking into a man's house, Amos. It's not that. But if I got in front of that camera it would bring back a too vivd recollection of the six months following my one photographic experience. I'm getting old and my nervous system wouldn't stand the strain.'

"'If that's the way you feel about it,' says Amos, 'I guess it's up to me. I ain't no Sarah Bernhardt, but I shifted scenes for a stock company once before I learned an easier way of making a living, so I'm not what you'd call a rank amateur. I'll do the acting.'

"'All right,' I says. 'I'll go see my friend and meet you here in half an hour.'

"I stopped in the first saloon around the corner, took a look at myself in the bar mirror and let my right hand borrow the ten from my inside pocket. Then I went back to Amos and we began collecting our paraphernalia.

"The next morning we drove up in front of the house in a big seven passenger car. If anyone had looked at the automobile and overlooked us, they might have thought we owned the place. Amos hadn't been modest when he picked out the house. It covered more ground than the St. Charles Hotel, and had money stamped all over it. From the out-

side it looked like a rich haul.

"We drove up to the curb in front of the house and Amos opened an old make-up box he'd borrowed from the fence that had let us have the camera. He was blacking his eyebrows when the policeman on the beat strolled up and took a look.

"Now I'm not particularly afraid of a policeman, but I'm not in the habit of walking around the block to get to talk to one. Dark blue never was my favourite color and I've had an aversion to brass buttons that dates back to my youth, when I swallowed one. I'm always uneasy when that combination is around. He stood on the curb watching us curiously.

" 'What are you up to?' he finally asked.

" 'Moving pictures,' says Amos, adjusting a cap like railroad firemen wear and tying a soiled red handkerchief around his neck. 'Say, do I look anything like a burglar? Being a policeman you ought to know the breed.'

" 'I've seen quite a few in my day,' laughed the cop, 'but I never saw one dressed up like you are, outside of a picture show.'

" 'People don't want the real thing in pictures,' says Amos. 'They want what they think is the real thing. I'm going to break into this house, so if you see me crawling through a window don't call out the reserves. Mr. Heinrich gave us permission to use his home in a feature film we're making.'

" 'Mr. Heinrich is a good sport,' say the flat-foot, 'but his mother is the limit. It's a good thing for you that she is away. She'd never stand for anything like this. If a crowd collects while you're working and causes any trouble, let me know.'

"He moved off down the street swinging his club and whistling to himself.

" 'Didn't I tell you we'd get police protection?' says Amos as we climbed out of the machine. 'This game is going to be a cinch until some one gets next to it.'

"I sat the camera up facing one of the windows that was close to the ground on the east side of the house and Amos went to work imitating a movie burglar breaking into a house. I'm no dramatic critic, but according to my notion, Amos's work was pretty raw. He didn't sneak up to the window, cautious like, looking around every few seconds to see if he was followed, but went right through it like the house was on fire and he was trying to get in to put it out.

" 'If that flat-foot is watching us' I thinks, 'he'll smell a mouse.' Amos is working like he's trying to break a record. I wanted to holler a warning at him, but didn't think it would be a wise thing to do. I felt like some one was watching us and it gave me an uneasy, creepy feeling. I wanted to turn around and see if anyone was looking, but couldn't afford to.

"As soon as Amos disappeared in the window I folded the tripod, swung the camera over my shoulder, and started around to the front of the house. There was a man standing on the sidewalk watching me. He was smiling like he was amused about something and I figured that he was just some passerby who had stopped

to watch us. Before I got to the front steps Amos opened the door.

" 'Come on,' he shouted; 'we'll take those interiors now.'

"The house was certainly furnished fine. There was enough silverware in the dining room to stock a first-class jewelry store and we began to worry because we hadn't brought two sacks. We were just emptying one of the sideboard drawers when some one coughed right behind us. I didn't jump or turn around, but it wasn't because I wasn't scared. I was paralyzed for a moment and couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to. Amos kept his head. When it comes to blue steel nerve you can't beat Amos.

" 'Set up your camera, Johnny,' he says to me, just as if he didn't know some one else was in the room. 'I'll dump this stuff out on the table and gloat over it according to the scenario and then we'll put it back.'

"We both rose up and looked into the barrel of a big automatic. The man holding it was the one I'd seen on the sidewalk.

" 'Sorry I had to disturb you,' says the man dryly. 'I always hate to butt in, but sometimes it's necessary.'

" 'That's all right,' I says. 'Just step a little to the right so you won't be in focus. We're taking a moving picture.'

" 'And some silverware,' he says. 'But you won't get away with it this time.'

" 'You're mistaken,' says Amos, calling out all the dignity he had in reserve. 'Mr. Heinrich gave us permission to use his house while we're taking this picture.'

" 'Did he?' says the man. 'My memory must be getting bad. I'm Mr. Heinrich.'

"That remark knocked everything right out from under me. I usually know the handwriting on the wall when I see it. Amos looked pretty sick, but he didn't give up.

" 'Which Mr. Heinrich?' he asks.

" 'H. B.' snapped the man.

" 'Then we owe you an apology,' smiled Amos, as suave as a well-fed preacher. 'We were to have taken the picture in John W. Heinrich's home. The office must have gotten confused and given us the wrong address.'

" 'That may be true,' says the man, looking like he didn't know whether to believe Amos or not, 'and it might be hot air. If you're what you claim to be I wouldn't cause you any trouble for the world. But if you are thieves, I'll turn you over to the police, of course.'

"He stood looking at us a moment, as if trying to make up his mind what to do and then, as if he had suddenly decided, he reached into his pocket and pulled out two pairs of handcuffs. 'I'll make you a fair proposition,' he continued. 'I'll put these handcuffs on you and then call up my cousin J. W. If everything is all right I'll open a bottle of wine and we'll all be friends.'

" 'That's perfectly satisfactory,' says Amos, in a voice remarkably cheerful for a man who had reached the end of his string. 'Put them on. We won't resist.'

"I thought Amos was figuring on getting the best of Mr. Heinrich when he got within reach, but he didn't. We just stood there as meek as lambs,

while he handcuffed my right hand to Amos' left and vice versa on the other side.

"'I don't believe you can get out now,' he says, moving toward the door. 'I'll be right back as soon as I telephone.'

"'I hope the warden down at Jefferson City is kind to his guests,' I says as soon as he had gone. 'Maybe he'll give us a double birth. I'm the kind of plant that don't flourish when transplanted among strangers. Why didn't you grab his gun?'

"'For the same reason that you didn't,' answered Amos. 'I'd rather go to the pen than commit suicide. We've still got a chance anyway. I wasn't running up a blind alley when I mentioned John W. There really is such a man and the paper said he and his family were leaving for the East today. If he's gone we've got a good chance to get away yet.'

"As a rule, I'm not pessimistic, but it took more imagination than I had to see a bright spot on our horizon. We were up against a 100 to 1 shot, playing the long end, and you know about how often you come through with one of those. Pretty soon the man came back. He seemed to be highly amused about something.

"'You poor boobs,' he says. 'I've seen amateur house-breakers before, but you're the rankest couple I ever heard of. Nothing but a novice would ever bother with a lot of bulky silverware when there was a ton or two of jewelry lying around loose upstairs.'

"He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of assorted jewelry.

"'Your intentions were good,' he continued, 'but your execution was poor, very poor. When I saw you pulling off that fake moving picture stunt, I knew that opportunity had knocked at my door and I didn't hesitate about letting her in. I'll leave with the grapes, gentlemen, and you can hold the bag. If the real Mr. Heinrich comes in, give him my regards.'

"I felt worse than a bride at the altar when the bridegroom fails to show up. I'd been playing suckers all my life and there I was with the shoe on the other foot. I sure did feel ashamed of myself.

"'You wouldn't leave two fellow members of your fraternity in a shape like this, would you?' asked Amos.

"'No,' smiled the man, 'I wouldn't. But when it comes to two blunderers like you, it's a different matter. You amateurs are what ruin our profession and I'm going to leave you here for the police to make an example of.'

"He turned to go, but only got as far as the door. For just then the policeman we'd talked to and another man came in.

"'How do you do, Mr. Heinrich,' says the man who had handcuffed us. 'You came at just the opportune time. I was passing and saw your door ajar. I came in to see what the trouble was and found these two men robbing your house. I had just started to call a policeman.'

"'He did not,' interrupted Amos. 'We were taking a moving picture, a burglar scene, when this man came in, trailed a gun on us and robbed the house. If you don't believe me, search him.'

"'That isn't a bad idea,' says Mr. Heinrich. 'Cover him with your gun, officer, and I'll search him.'

"'No use to do that,' says the crook, beginning to empty his pockets. 'I just took these valuables away from those two and put them in my pocket for safe keeping.'

"'Sounds fishy,' growled the cop, producing a pair of handcuffs. 'I'll put these on until we get matters straightened out.'

"'This is an outrage,' complained the crook. 'I try to do you a good turn and get arrested for my trouble.'

"'I believe they're all crooks,' says Mr. Heinrich. 'I don't know this man and I never gave anyone permission to use my house as a moving picture studio.'

"'If I wanted to rob your house, do you think I'd come in broad daylight all dressed up like this?' asked Amos. 'Be reasonable. Why, I even told the policeman here, just what we intended to do.'

"'That's true,' says the cop. I don't believe you two had anything to do with robbing the house, but it won't do any harm for all of us to go down to headquarters until we get this straightened out.'

"Amos started to reply, but I kicked him on the shin. I'd been watching Mr. Heinrich and had decided to take a long chance. His eyes were bloodshot and watery, his hands trembled, and he kept licking his lips.

"'Keep still,' I says in a stage whisper. 'I thought Mr. Heinrich was soused last night when the boss asked him about taking this picture. He don't remember a thing about it. Let him take us to the police station. We'll get a lot of free advertising out of it.'

"Mr. Heinrich heard me and his face hardened. I thought for a moment he was going to break into an angry tirade. But he must have suddenly changed his mind for the angry look left his features and he smiled whimsically.

"'I remember now, that I gave someone permission to take pictures in my house,' he said, slipping the policeman a bill. 'I'll vouch for these two. You'd better take the other fellow with you.'

"The cop palmed the bill, winked at us and took the handcuffs off our wrists. The other fellow kicked and promised to do all sorts of things for the injustice they were doing him, but was led out just the same.

"When they had gone, Mr. Heinrich turned to us.

"'I admire nerve,' he says, 'especially when it's mixed with brains. You boys certainly have the mixture. That is what saved you. I haven't been on a spree. My mother had an attack of ptomaine poisoning; had to be taken to the hospital and I sat up there all night. That moving picture ruse of yours is new and clever and deserves a better fate than failure. But we can't always win, no matter how smart we are. In cases of this kind, excuses are always in order. Which one of you has a golden-haired little girl at home, waiting patiently for daddy and some eats, and which one has a brother out west dying with tuberculosis?'

"'You do us an injustice,' says Amos. 'Them two was worn out be-

fore Methuselah put on his first pair of long pants. We ain't going to spring any alibies. We came in to get what valuables we could. We want to get to New York to renew our vocation there. Business in this section is on the bum.'

"'And if it wouldn't be asking too much of an old friend,' I added, 'we'd like to borrow enough to get there.'

"'I wish I had on my hat,' he says, reaching for his roll, 'I'd like to take it off to you two. You've got more brass than a new fire engine. Here, take this and go before you borrow my watch and scarf pin.'"

"Mr. Heinrich must have been a very kind man," I said as we arose to leave the restaurant. "It's a wonder to me that he didn't kick you out."

"'He couldn't very well,' smiled Jerry. 'You see, Amos had him covered with his gun.'"

Tea—With a Wink

BY ELLA FERRE

"A bottle of fine—tea" (with a wink) and every thirsty citizen of a little dry town bought—tea (with a wink).

HE stepped from the morning local from Fresno at the little station of L——, looked about, spied the sign "Capital Hotel" over the hostelry of that name, skipped across the road, carrying his valise, and entered the lobby. No bar in sight; only a flat-topped desk, a telephone, a stove, and benches and chairs about. The proprietor, a thin wisp of a man —a poor advertisement for the viands he served—came forward to meet him.

"This is a dry town, I take it?" remarked the traveller, smiling.

"Been dry for fifteen years," returned mine host.

"Hm-m-m-m!" sizing up the hotel man out of the side of his eye. "Your guests drink *tea,* I presume?"

"Sure; and coffee, and cold water, occasionally."

"I'll take a stroll and be back for dinner. Twelve o'clock?"

"Eleven-thirty."

"O. K. So long! See you later." He strolled out carrying his valise.

A few doors up the street he came to a billiard room in connection with a barber shop. The place seemed well patronized. He strolled in and stood a few moments apparently watching the game, but in reality picking his man. Presently he touched a long, lank fellow, with a southern burr, on the arm and beckoned him aside.

"I have in this valise," he said, in a low tone, "some pint bottles of first-class—tea." He looked steadily into the other's eyes, and deliberately winked one eye, and grinned. The fellow returned the grin.

"I'm on," he chuckled. "What's the damage?"

"One dollar a bottle. See here, if you'll help me to get rid of my stock I'll make you a present of a bottle. I've a couple more cases over at the station, but they can't be opened here."

"I'll fix that," replied the other. "Hang around here and I'll be back." He lounged away. In the course of half an hour he lounged back again, tipped the wink to the traveller and went casually out. The traveller, after waiting a few minutes, followed as casually. His man was a hundred feet ahead of him, lounging carelessly along, chewing a straw. He followed at a discreet distance.

His guide led him for half a mile to a deserted cabin off in a stubble field, behind a clump of trees. He entered the cabin and the travelling man followed. There he found about twenty men of all ages, expectancy written largely on their faces.

They gathered about him. The man with the valise set it down and

stood up facing the crowd.

"Boys," he said, pleasantly, "I have here about a dozen bottles of finest grade—tea." He winked. "The rest of my stock is in two cases—two dozen each—at the station. This is a dry town, and I would not attempt to sell anything stronger, or more exhilarating than—tea." He winked again. "Even as it is, I shall ask you after having patronized me, to take the—tea quietly home, and say nothing to any one until I am out of the town. I take the one o'clock train back to Fresno. If you do not agree to this, I shall have to refuse to sell and hike on. Otherwise, your marshal or constable, or whatever title your officer bears, will nab me. Here." He took from his vest pocket a flask and passed it around. "Sample it, boys," he invited. They did so. "How is it? Pretty good tea, hey?" There was a general laugh and repeated assurances of "fine!"

By this time, the twenty men had been augmented by as many more, They spoke in whispers. He took out his note book and fountain pen and took down their orders. Forty bottles of—tea, sold in ten minutes, at one dollar a bottle.

"Those cases at the station," he told them, hold forty-eight bottles; I have here twelve, which makes sixty, besides the one I am going to present to my friend here. I'd like to get rid of it all before I leave."

There was a consultation, and hands shoved into pockets, coins jingled, and sixty dollars collected and passed over to the travelling man.

"Here's the receipt for the two cases at the station," said he. "Two of you men hike over and fetch them here; then you'll have it all ready to divide up when I am safe out of town. Lot of trouble for a few bottles of—tea." He winked.

Two of the men were dispatched for the cases, and presently returned with them on their shoulders. The cabin was locked, the key given into the hands of a trusted member of the crowd, and the men dispersed, a few at a time, and wandered back towards town, without attracting undue attention. The travelling man was the last to leave. He carried his empty valise, and walked back with the tall Southerner.

At the edge of town they separated, the travelling man going ostensibly to the hotel, but in reality turning off after his companion was out of sight, following the track back towards Fresno. He consulted his watch. He had just two hours to make the northbound 12.15 train at M——, the first station south of L——. He struck out at a lively gait. Presently, he was overtaken by a motor-car and given a "lift" to his destination.

As this train due at L—— at 12.25 pulled into the station, a man with an empty valise slipped well down into his seat and pulled his hat over his eyes. It was a tense few minutes while the train waited at the station, and an immense relief when it pulled out. As it gained speed he cautiously peered out of the window.

A group of men were congregated in front of the hotel, angrily discussing some momentous question, and watching the door through which a certain travelling man was supposed to pass on his way to the south-bound

one o'clock train to Fresno.

The man in the car grinned, jingled something pleasantly in his pocket, and sank comfortably back for his ride to Fresno.

Out at the cabin in the stubble field, the travelling man was scarcely out of sight before the forty men reassembled; the cases were opened and the bottles extracted and distributed.

Each man opened his bottle, took a gulp, spat it out, and swore. Bottle after bottle was tested and the contents of each and every one proven to be, as the travelling man had said it was—TEA.

The Man Behind the Mask

BY H. P. HOLT

An American citizen, through the agency of an unsuspecting fellow-countryman, frustrates the design of a cowardly traitor.

URRAY'S HOTEL is a little way off the main arteries of New York. The entrance is less imposing than that of the Grand Central or the Royal Continental Hotels, but its chef receives a more munificent salary than the culinary chief at either of the other establishmnts, and the manager, Herr Wolffe, is well aware of that fact, but he is quite satisfied.

Casual visitors who stay at Murray's Hotel might consider it too quiet, and would most probably regard their bill with awe. But Herr Wolffe has his regular patrons who come and go, regardless of seasons. Of some he knows little but their name; there are others whose names are known far beyond the confines of the States. Herr Wolffe was always admirably discreet. There have been times when he might have been able to throw light on the strange resemblance between a quiet guest and some personality with an honoured name, but Herr Wolffe's tact is the point upon which his fortunes have turned.

Only on one occasion, and that was long ago, has his perfect self-confidence been known to waver momentarily at a critical instant, and then the lapse was revealed in the flicker of an eyelid. Before he became manager at Murray's Hotel he held a responsible position in the household of one of the lesser kings of Europe. The king had known him from boyhood. Herr Wolffe was standing in the vestibule of the hotel when Gordon Fergusson, whom he knew well, entered with a companion.

"Signor Cortez and I wish to be called at six o'clock in the morning," said Fergusson. "We can depend upon it, Herr Wolffe?"

The manager's eyes met those of Signor Cortez. Instinctively his glance turned to a ring the king invariably wore on his little finger, but even before he had had time to recognize the quaintly mounted stone, he had regained his self-possession. His bow was a normal one.

"Herr Wolffe never fails us," observed Fergusson.

"I am quite sure of that," said Signor Cortez with an enigmatical smile as he passed toward the lift. Truly the manager was a monument of discretion.

Gordon Fergusson frequently stayed at Murray's Hotel, but his visits were spasmodic and he often went away as abruptly as he arrived. He had been there three days when the liveried attendant at the door touched his hat to Brenton Freyne as he stepped from a cab. The attendant was a particularly observant individ-

ual, otherwise he would not have noticed at a glance that Freyne's dressing case bore labels which showed that he had been in both Berlin and St. Petersburg since he last stayed at Murray's Hotel, a couple of months previously.

"I'm afraid the room you usually use is occupied, sir," said the attendant.

"It doesn't matter much," replied Freyne, somewhat wearily. "Tell them to put me on the same floor, though." He was tired of travel. It was good to be back under the ægis of Herr Wolffe, who received him graciously. He knew Brenton Freyne to be a wealthy, restless traveller, who was a credit to his establishment even among the distinguished patrons who stayed there. Before the death of his wife, Freyne had been a prominent figure among history makers. For a little while after his bereavement he remained in the fore-front of politics, but the blow was a cruel one, and he had now spent more than three years wandering from one country to another.

As he stepped from the lift on the first floor, he encountered Gordon Fergusson. The pleasure with which they greeted one another was mutual. Freyne had formed a curious liking for this man whom he had known for many years, and whom he was constantly meeting in unexpected places. The last time he saw him was at Warsaw; a year before, they both dined with the American Consul in Pekin; once they had spent a week together in Rome.

Fergusson was verging on his fiftieth year, but his tall figure had lost none of its elasticity. He was a brilliant conversationalist because he had a marvellous memory and he appeared to have the peculiar gift which is characteristic of some great men, of gauging his thoughts before they were uttered. And yet he was singularly reticent concerning himself. He never seemed to make any secret about his movements, but why he moved was another matter entirely. An idle inquiry would have been greeted with a lazy shrug of the shoulders. Gordon Fergusson was not the type of person one would have pressed for a more definite reply. Beneath the well-bred mask of indifference which he invariably wore, there lurked a latent fire. Few of his most intimate friends even suspected the force with which that fire could burn. Fewer still had an inkling of the purpose to which he applied it. Freyne had occasionally wondered what the man behind the mask was like. Herr Wolffe, by piecing together one or two incidents which had come partly under his notice, might have obtained a glimmering of the truth; but Herr Wolffe had the well-being of his hotel to think about and rarely indulged in speculation.

"New York gains what Berlin loses," observed Fergusson, his inscrutable eyes quietly fixed on those of Freyne. The later had walked several yards along the corridor before the idea struck him that it was odd for Fergusson to have mentioned Berlin. He only stayed there one night after leaving Russia; he had come direct from the German capital to New York; and he had spoken to no one about the matter.

"He certainly is a most remarkable individual," Freyne mused as he turned to his room. He noticed a small piece of paper, bearing a vague resemblance to a folded bank-note, lying on the floor near the door, and out of idle curiosity he picked it up. He could tell by the touch of it, however, that it was merely tissue paper and he put it down on the table in his room together with a book and one or two letters which he had taken from the rack in the vestibule. Before going out again he stuffed the letters, and, inadvertently, the scrap of paper with them, into his pocket.

As he passed the room he usually occupied when staying in Murray's Hotel, the door opened and a man looked out. Something furtive about his manner arrested Freyne's attention Their eyes met. Freyne saw abject terror and despair in the man's face. He would have passed on, but the stranger raised his finger and beckoned him. Without pausing to think of possible consequences, Freyne crossed the threshold and the man closed the door, turning the key in the lock. The sun was pouring through the window, under which a steady stream of people were passing.

A policeman was ambling along with no more exciting thought than the fact that it was nearly time to go off duty. Everything outside was placid. But Freyne's companion was the living embodiment of tragedy. Great knotted veins stood out on his temples; the nostrils were slightly dilated with evident terror; there was a look in his eyes which might have suggested madness, but for other signs of evident mental strain.

"You are an American?" The man's words were jerked out. His lips were as dry as blazing wood and he sought in vain to moisten them with his tongue.

The other bowed slightly.

"And as such you would endeavor to carry out the last behest of a dying man?"

"If the request were in accordance with honour," Freyne replied.

"Yes—yes," said the man quickly. "First of all, you do not think you are talking to a lunatic?"

"You are obviously laboring under considerable excitement," was the quiet reply.

"That may be—God! Who would not, under the circumstances? I want you to deliver a message to my wife. Here is the address. In an hour, perhaps less, I shall be dead. No, no, I'm neither insane nor tired of life. A week ago—two days ago, even—I was full of hope and ambition both for myself—and her." He added the last two words in a strained voice as he pointed to the slip of paper on which the address was written "But now everything is changed. I've—but that doesn't concern you. They'll kill me, I expect; and if they don't I shall have to take my own life."

"But," interjected Freyne in a calm voice, "are you not allowing your imagination to magnify your danger? See, there is a telephone. You need not even leave this room. If someone has threatened you, ring up the police and in less than five minutes you will have a dozen people to protect you."

"Psha!" broke in the man impatiently. "The police—they are slightly less powerful than earth worms in this matter. I am up against—but the doesn't concern you either. I want her to think of me as a man of honour after I have gone and that my death was due to an accident. She knows I always carry a revolver, and she must be told I was cleaning it when it went off. It doesn't much matter as far as *they* are concerned. If they kill me in cold blood an intelligent jury, in the innocence of their hearts, will bring in a verdict of suicide. Will you take this message—for the woman's sake?" he asked in a voice that trembled.

Freyne extended his hand and took the piece of paper. A puzzled expression crossed his face as he read it.

"You say this is your wife?" he remarked.

"The best and purest woman that ever breathed," the other man replied.

"But the name is that of Mrs. Stopford. I noticed in the hotel book that your name was Goss."

"Bah! These are trivialities that one cannot stay to discuss on the brink of eternity." His fingers were twitching nervously. "I simply want you tell her that I died accidentally and that my last thoughts were of her."

Freyne looked wonderingly from the slip of paper to the man.

"Will you deliver that message after I am dead?"

"I hope there may be no occasion to do so," Freyne replied. He felt he was in a quandary. The appeal for a woman's sake was the only thing that deterred him from either summoning the police in spite of his companion's statement, or declining to be associated with the affair at all. After a moment's reflection he decided it would be more advisable to humour the man.

"If you should die, I will certainly deliver it," he said gravely, "but get the idea of murder out of your head. You are perfectly safe in this hotel—as safe as you would be anywhere in the world."

The man smiled grimly.

"Yes, but no safer than I should be anywhere else in the world," he replied slowly. "You don't understand. They—but I must say no more."

It was not yet noon. Freyne strolled out into the street and meandered about for an hour before he entered a quiet restaurant and ordered luncheon. His thoughts were still running on the words uttered by the man in the hotel—words which seemed more nonsensical than ever as he contemplated his own safety and that of every one around him. He was rather surprised, a few minutes later, when Gordon Ferguson entered the place, but he motioned him to his table and they had lunch together.

"I thought I was almost the only person in New York who knew of the existence of this restaurant," said Freyne.

"On the contrary," replied Ferguson, "there are at least three people here, including ourselves, from Herr Wolff's establishment. If you glance in that mirror at your left you will see the third—a German." Fer-

gusson's inscrutable eyes were fixed like steel gimlets upon Freyne. The latter's expression hardly changed.

"I didn't know he was at Murray's," he said, "but that is the third time I have seen him this afternoon—a curious coincidence, I suppose."

Fergusson did not answer for a moment; he was engrossed in the occupation of carving a grilled sole.

"He came from Berlin," he remarked after a pause, his eyes again fixed on Freyne.

"I never saw him before," observed Freyne, dismissing the subject from his mind. After they had finished lunch Fergusson pleaded an appointment and left his companion, who strolled about aimlessly until he reached the hotel. It was then growing dusk. He went direct to his room, where he switched on the electric light and began to write letters. A few seconds afterwards, a muffled report reached his ears. It was not distinct and it might easily have been the back-firing of a motor-car; but the memory of his conversation with the man who was afraid came back to him. He tried to continue writing, but could not. At length he went out in the corridor. Herr Wolffe was just leaving the room that Freyne usually occupied. Freyne stood motionless. A vague, uneasy apprehension had gripped him, and he passed his hand over his brow. A message had been given to him—was it time to deliver it? While he was still collecting his thoughts, Gordon Fergusson passed along the corridor. His step was particularly alert and, though his demeanour was impassive, there was the something shining in his eyes which had sometimes made Freyne wonder what the man behind the mask was like.

"What was that noise?" Freyne asked as they stepped into his room together.

"Have I your permission to lock your door?" Fergusson asked in reply.

"If it affords you the faintest degree of satisfaction," the other replied. He was beginning to be prepared for anything. The events of the day began to whirl through his brain rapidly. Odd things had been happening. There was an atmosphere of something he did not understand around him. Fergusson locked the door and put the key on the table. For the first time in his life, Freyne saw the other man as he really was. The mask was off, and his face had almost changed. The lazy-looking individual whom Freyne had always known had vanished. In his place stood a stern, resolute man, with all the power and strength of character that his square jaw indicated, reflected in his keen eyes.

"I want to get you out of trouble—if you will let me," Fergusson said. His words were snapped out like the cracking of whips.

"My dear fellow," Freyne replied easily, but somewhat puzzled, "I don't think I have a trouble in the world."

"That is because you do not know," replied his friend. "As a matter of fact, even your life is not safe; you are the center of an extremely critical situation."

"Go on," said Freyne, tapping his long, thin fingers on the edge of the table.

"I believe—in fact, I am convinced —that you have been drawn into the matter entirely without your having any knowledge of what was happening, and my basis for that theory is long personal acquaintance with you, and your service in the inner political circles of this country."

"Go on," repeated Freyne.

"Do you accept unconditionally the belief that I am speaking entirely in your own interests?"

"Certainly!"

"Then are you prepared to answer me one or two questions fully and frankly—with perfect candour?" Fergusson was standing behind a chair, the back of which he was gripping so tightly that his hands were white.

"With pleasure," replied Freyne.

"What was your business in Berlin?"

"I do not think I spoke to anyone at all excepting hotel servants."

"Ah!" The ejaculation escaped Fergusson. It expressed satisfaction. "I am glad of that," he said. "You left this hotel at eleven o'clock this morning. Automatically I have been informed of every little movement you made from that time—"

"Really?" said Freyne, his back stiffening slightly.

"You must not mind," replied Fergusson with an impatient gesture. "You have no idea of the gravity of the interests involved. Now I want you to tell me voluntarily what happened just before eleven o'clock."

A vision of the man who was haunted by terror came back to Freyne. He paused to think a second. How far was he justified in repeating what he had heard?

"Perhaps," he replied at length, "I may be able to help you if—"

"It is I who am trying to help you, remember," said Fergusson quickly.

"Well, it may help us if you will answer my first question about the noise I heard in the room over there."

"Oh, that is some wretch gone to his Maker. But he is only a pawn in the game."

"What game?" asked Freyne simply.

"The game of international warfare," said Fergusson bluntly. "Now, will you help me to help you?"

"He told me he was going to be killed or commit suicide within an hour," replied Freyne in level tones. He felt the veil of mystery was closing tighter and closer round him.

"You were in his room exactly twelve minutes. What else did he say?"

"I think, Fergusson, there are some things concerning which a man has no right to speak. I hope you will accept my word that there was no reference to diplomatic complications in our conversation."

The other man's hands tightened on the back of the chair.

"And you, Freyne, know I am neither speaking idly nor uttering a threat when I say that at the present minute, you are enmeshed by the highest forces of the country's power. There are some things that must go on as inevitably as life itself. It would be impossible for me to free you from this network if I failed much longer. This I will say, at least, that nothing you say to me will be repeated. Now, did the man who is dead give you any message?"

"Yes, for his wife," said Freyne.

A blaze of triumph shone in Ferguson's eyes.

"Have you delivered it?"

"No."

"Where is it now?"

"It was a verbal message to let the woman live afterwards in the belief that her husband had died accidently. Here is the address he gave me."

Ferguson seized the paper eagerly and scanned it, holding it to the light. Then he handed it back disappointedly.

"He gave you nothing else?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Have you undertaken to deliver any other message for anyone else in the hotel?"

Freyne smiled. "I so rarely act as a messenger," he said.

"But have you?" persisted the other man.

"No."

"Then may I beg of you to search your personal belongings. The man who is dead brought into this building a document, rather than lose which, the country would go to war if necessary. Stopford—and by the way—he did take his own life, but only when disgrace and dishonor were left—was one of the private and confidential secretaries to the Minister of War. Even Stopford did not know of the existence of methods which are adopted to guard the country's vital secrets. He arranged to sell the document to a foreign power and he was allowed to carry his negotiations up to a certain point. The German you saw in the restaurant is the agent with whom he was dealing. Had he succeeded, he would have received a sum of money which would have kept him in affluence for the rest of his life. He arrived here last night and his every movement was watched. The German came this morning, but before that there was an unfathomable *contretemps*. The document vanished. There is no possible question whether he brought it here, nor has he had any opportunity of disposing of it. This morning he was quietly chloroformed and even the lining of his clothing searched, but in vain. Every other room on this floor was been examined with minute care by men who knew their work. Even the carpets in this room were taken up during your absence. Stopford was never allowed to suspect that the authorities were aware of what he was doing, therefore he did not destroy the document. You will see how you unwittingly compromised yourself by going into his room this morning. Moreover, by the simplest form of deduction, the missing document, which is somewhere on this floor of the hotel, and is not anywhere outside this room, must be in this room. The powerful agents of two nations, backed up by their respective governments, are hovering about like hawks, or vultures, if you will, and are willing to go to any extremes to secure it. Now you may realize how desperate is the need for action. Would you mind going through your trunk?"

"But I have not even opened it, or my dressing case either."

"Oh, locks count for little when such issues are at stake," replied Ferguson. Freyne put his hand in his

pocket for his keys and then a vague memory came back to him. He stood up.

"This document," he said, a touch of real excitement creeping into his manner for the first time, "—do you know what is consisted of?"

"Yes, tissue paper or tracing paper," said Ferguson in a low voice.

"Why—why I picked up a piece of tissue paper this morning. I remember now, it was in the corridor."

Ferguson's eyes were ablaze again.

"Yes; what became of it? Quick, man!"

" I fancy I brought it in here. Yes, I had some letters in my hand and put it with them."

"The letters—where are they?" The question came like a gun shot.

Freyne dived into his pocket. He brought out a handful of papers and threw them on the table. Eagerly the two men searched through them together. Freyne felt once more in the same pocket. His fingers closed on something crumpled up and crushed, that crackled as he drew it out.

A curious change came over Ferguson. The heat of the chase was over. In a moment he had become impassive again, and his grey eyes shone no longer with the passion that had been within him. He held out his hand quietly and gripped that of Freyne.

"Man," he said, "you've saved countless thousands of lives, and perhaps your country, too, by picking that up. Stopford must have dropped it somehow in his agitation. It contains the key-note of America's supremacy to-day—designs of an apparatus which has entirely revolutionized warfare. So long as America keeps that to herself she is safe, for the country we had the greatest reason to fear knows it is ours and they know its significance."

He pressed a bell and a waiter appeared.

"Tell Herr Dankmann that I should be glad to see him here and now on a matter of great importance," he said, lighting a cigarette.

A few moments later the German appeared at the door.

"You asked for me?" he said pleasantly.

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied Ferguson.

The German's eyes narrowed for the fraction of a second.

"Why do you address me as 'Excellency'?" he asked in the same suave manner. "I am Herr Dankmann."

"If it is your wish, Your Excellency," replied Ferguson, bowing slightly. "The death of Mr. Stopford was unfortunate?" he added.

"Ah, yes," replied the German, looking at the two men with expressionless eyes.

"There is no need for anyone else to die," continued Ferguson, "and to convince you of that I have invited you here to see a little cremation ceremony."

"But why?" said the German. He played his part well still.

"I have a document here—a tracing which my friend, Freyne, will be kind enough to burn for me." He held it up. The suspicion of a dangerous gleam came into the German's eyes. Ferguson calmly took a re-

volver from his pocket.

"If you interfere—the verdict will be another case of accidental death, as you are perfectly well aware," he said, without the faintest trace of emotion. "Put a match to it, Freyne, and crush the ashes in that tray."

The little light flickered up and died. A small patch of grey powder was all that remained.

"Gentlemen, I am at a loss—" the German exclaimed.

"And your loss is America's gain," said Fergusson with a charming smile as he bowed again to the departing visitor.

Freyne reached for his overcoat.

"Going out?" queried Fergusson.

"I have a message to deliver to a woman," was the reply.

John Jones's Dollar

BY HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

A clever tale, the numerical results of which were computed by logarithms, is this story of a modest silver dollar deposited by a far-seeing old socialist, in the year 1914, to his fortieth descendant, who never was born.

ON the 201st day of the year 3214 A.D., the professor of history at the University of Terra, seated himself in front of the Visaphone and prepared to deliver the daily lecture to his class, the members of which resided in different portions of the earth.

The instrument before which he seated himself was very like a great window sash, on account of the fact that there were three or four hundred frosted glass squares visible. In a space at the center, not occupied by any of these glass squares, was a dark oblong area and a ledge holding a piece of chalk. And above this area was a huge brass cylinder toward which the professor directed his subsequent remarks.

In order to assure himself that it was time to press the button which would notify the members of the class in history to approach their local Visaphones, the professor withdrew from his vest pocket a small contrivance which he held to his ear. Upon moving a tiny switch attached to the instrument, a metallic voice, seeming to come from somewhere in space, repeated mechanically: "F i f t e e n o'clock a n d o n e minute—fifteen o'clock and one minute—fifteen o'clock and one min——" Quickly, the professor replaced the instrument in his vest pocket and pressed a button at the side of the Visaphone.

As though in answer to the summons, the frosted glass squares began, one by one, to show the faces and shoulders of a peculiar type of young men; young men with great bulging foreheads, bald, toothless, and wearing immense horn spectacles. One square, however, still remained empty. On noticing this, a look of irritation passed over the professor's countenance.

But, upon seeing that every other glass square but this one was filled up, he commenced his talk.

"I am pleased, gentlemen, to see you all posted at your local Visaphones this afternoon. I have prepared my lecture today upon a subject which is, perhaps, of more economic interest than historical. Unlike the previous lectures, my talk will not confine itself to the happenings of a few years, but will gradually embrace the course of ten centuries, the ten centuries, in fact, which terminated three hundred years before the present date. My lecture will be an exposition of the effects of the John Jones Dollar, originally deposited in the dawn of civilization, or, to be more precise, in the year 1914—just thirteen hundred years ago. This John Jon——"

At this point in the professor's lecture, the frosted glass square which hitherto had shown no image, now filled up. Sternly he gazed at the head and shoulders that had just appeared.

"B2621172476Male, you are late to class again. What excuse have you to offer today?"

From the hollow cylinder emanated a shrill voice, while the lips of the picture on the glass square moved in unison with the words:

"Professor, you will perceive by consulting your class book, that I have recently taken up my residence near the North Pole. For some reason, wireless communication between the Central Energy Station and all points north of 89 degrees was cut off a while ago, on account of which fact I could not appear in the Visaphone. Hence—"

"Enough, sir," roared the professor. "Always ready with an excuse, B262H72476Male. I shall immediately investigate your tale."

From his coat pocket, the professor withdrew an instrument which, although supplied with an earpiece and a mouthpiece, had no wires whatever attached. Raising it to his lips he spoke:

"Hello. Central Energy Station, please." A pause ensued. "Central Energy Station? This is the professor of history at the University of Terra, speaking. One of my students informs me that the North Pole region was out of communication with the Visaphone System this morning. Is that statement true? I would—"

A voice, apparently from nowhere, spoke into the professor's ear. "Quite true, Professor. A train of our ether waves accidentally fell into parallelism with a train of waves from the Venus Sub-station. By the most peculiar mischance, the two trains happened to be displaced, with reference to each other, one half of a wave length, with the unfortunate result that the nodal points of one coincided with the points of maximum amplitude of the other. Hence the two wave trains nullified each other and communication ceased for one hundred and eighty-five seconds—until the earth had revolved far enough to throw them out of parallelism."

"Ah! Thank you," replied the professor. He dropped his instrument into his coat pocket and gazed in the direction of the glass square whose image had so aroused his ire. "I apologize, B262H72476Male, for my suspicions as to your veracity—but I had in mind several former experiences." He shook a warning forefinger. "I will now resume my talk."

"A moment ago, gentlemen, I mentioned the John Jones Dollar. Some of you who have just enrolled with the class will undoubtedly say to yourselves: 'What is a John Jones? What is a Dollar?'

"In the early days, before the present scientific registration of human beings was instituted by the National Eugenics Society, man went around under a crude multi-reduplicative system of nomenclature. Under this system there were actually more John Joneses than there are calories in a British Thermal Unit. But there was one John Jones, in particular, living in the twentieth century, to whom I shall refer in my lecture. Not much is

known of his personal life except that he was an ardent socialist—a bitter enemy, in fact, of the private ownership of wealth.

"Now as to the Dollar. At this day, when the Psycho-Erg, a combination of the Psych, the unit of esthetic satisfaction, and the Erg, the unit of mechanical energy, is recognized as the true unit of value, it seems difficult to believe that in the twentieth century and for more than ten centuries thereafter, the Dollar, a metallic circular disk, was being passed from hand to hand in exchange for the essentials of life.

"But, nevertheless, such was the case. Man exchanged his mental or physical energy for these Dollars. He then re-exchanged the Dollars for sustenance, raiment, pleasure, and operations for the removal of the vermiform appendix.

"A great many individuals, however, deposited their Dollars in a stronghold called a bank. These banks invested the Dollars in loans and commercial enterprises, with the result that, every time the earth traversed the solar ecliptic, the banks compelled each borrower to repay, or to acknowledge as due, the original loan, plus six one-hundredths of that loan. And to the depositor, the banks paid three one-hundredths of the deposited Dollars for the use of the disks. This was known as three percent, or bank interest.

"Now, the safety of Dollars, when deposited in banks, was not absolutely assured to the depositor. At times, the custodians of these Dollars were wont to appropriate them and proceed to portions of the earth, sparsely inhabited and accessible with difficulty. And at other times, nomadic groups known as 'yeggmen' visited the banks, opened the vaults by force, and departed, carrying with them the contents.

"But to return to our subject. In the year 1914, one of these numerous John Joneses performed an apparently inconsequential action which caused the name of John Jones to go down forever in history. What did he do?

"He proceeded to one of these banks, known at that time as 'The First National Bank of Chicago,' and deposited there, one of these disks—a silver Dollar—to the credit of a certain individual. And this individual to whose credit the Dollar was deposited was no other person than the fortieth descendant of John Jones who stipulated in paper which was placed in the files of the bank, that the descendency was to take place along the oldest child of each of the generations which would constitute his posterity.

"The bank accepted the Dollar under that understanding, together with another condition imposed by this John Jones, namely, that the interest was to be compounded annually. That meant that the close of each year, the bank was to credit the account of John Jones's fortieth descendant with three one-hundredths of the account as it stood at the beginning of the year.

"History tells us little more concerning this John Jones—only that he died in the year 1924, or ten years afterward, leaving several children.

"Now you gentlemen who are tak-

ing mathematics under Professor L127M72421Male, of the University of Mars, will remember that where any number such as X, in passing through a progressive cycle of change, grows at the end of that cycle by a proportion p, then the value of the original X, after n cycles, becomes $x(1+p)^n$.

"Obviously, in this case, X equalled one Dollar; p equalled three one-hundredths; and n will depend upon any number of years which we care to consider, following the date of deposit. By a simple calculation, those of you who are today mentally alert can check up the results that I shall set forth in my lecture.

"At the time that John Jones died, the amount in the First National Bank of Chicago to the credit of John Jones the fortieth, was as follows."

The professor seized the chalk and wrote rapidly upon the oblong space:

1924 10 years elapsed $1.34

"The peculiar sinuous hieroglyphic," he explained, "is an ideograph representing the Dollar.

"Well, gentlemen, time went on as time will, until a hundred years had passed by. This First National Bank still existed, and the locality, Chicago, had become the largest center of population upon the earth. Through the investments that had taken place, and the yearly compounding of interest, the status of John Jones's deposit was now as follows." He wrote:

2014 100 years elapsed $19.10

"In the following century, many minor changes, of course, took place in man's mode of living; but the so-called socialists still agitated wildly for the cessation of private ownership of wealth; the First National Bank still accepted Dollars for safe keeping, and the John Jones Dollar still continued to grow. With about thirty-four generations yet to come, the account now stood:

2114 200 years elapsed $364.00

"And by the end of the succeeding hundred years, it had grown to what constituted an appreciable bit of exchange value in those days—thus:

2214 300 years. $6920

"Now the century which followed contains an important date. The date I am referring to is the year 2292 A.D., or the year in which every human being born upon the globe was registered under a numerical name at the central bureau of the National Eugenics Society. In our future lessons which will treat with that period in detail, I shall ask you to memorize that date.

"The socialists still agitated, fruitlessly, but the First National Bank of Chicago was now the first International Bank of the Earth. And how great had John Jones's Dollar grown? Let us examine the account, both on that important historical date, and also at the close of the 400th year since it was deposited. Look:

2292 378 years $68,900

2314 400 years $132,000

"But, gentlemen, it had not yet reached the point where it could be termed an unusually large accumulation of wealth. Far larger accumulations existed upon the earth. A descendant of a man once known as John D. Rockefeller possessed an accumulation of great size, but which, as a matter of fact, was rapidly dwindling as it passed from genera-

tion to generation. So, let us travel ahead another one hundred years. During this time, as we learn from our historical and political archives, the socialists began to die out, since they at last realized the utter futility of combating the balance of power. The account, though, now stood:

2414 500 years $2,520,000

"It is hardly necessary for me to make any comment. Those of you who are most astute, and others of you who flunked my course before and are now taking it the second time, of course know what is coming.

"Now, the hundred years which ended with the year 2514 A.D., saw two events—one, very important and vital to mankind, and the other very interesting. I will explain.

"During the age in which this John Jones lived, there lived also a man, a so-called scientist called Metchnikoff. We know, from a study of our vast collection of Egyptian Papyri and Carnegie Library books, that this Metchnikoff promulgated the theory that old age—or rather senility—was caused by a colon-bacillus. This fact was later verified. But while he was correct in the etiology of senility, he was crudely primeval in the therapeutics of it.

"He proposed, gentlemen, to combat and kill this bacillus by utilizing the fermented lacteal fluid from a now extinct animal called the cow, models of which you can see at any time at the Solaris Museum."

A chorus of shrill, piping laughter emanated from the brass cylinder. The professor waited until the merriment had subsided and then continued:

"I beg of you, gentlemen, do not smile. This was merely one of the many similar quaint superstitions existing in that age.

"But a real scientist, Professor KI22B62411Male, again attacked the problem in the twenty-fifth century. Since the cow was now extinct, he could not waste his valuable time experimenting with fermented cow lacteal fluid. He discovered that the old γ rays of Radium—the rays which you physicists will remember are not deflected by a magnetic field—were really composed of two sets of rays, which he termed the δ rays and the ϵ rays. These last named rays—only when isolated—completely devitalized all colon-bacilli which lay in their path, without in the least affecting the integrity of any interposed organic cells. The great result, as many of you already know, was that the life of man was extended to nearly two hundred years. That, I state unequivocally, was a great century for the human race.

"But I spoke of another happening—one, perhaps, of more interest than importance. I referred to the account of John Jones the fortieth. It, gentlemen, had grown to such a prodigious sum that a special bank and board of directors had to be created in order to care for, and re-invest it. By scanning the following notation, you will perceive the truth of my statement:

2514 600 years $47,900,000

"By the year 2614 A.D., two events of stupendous importance took place. There is scarcely a man in this class who has not heard of how Professor P222D29333Male a c c i d e n t a l l y

stumbled upon the scientific fact that the effect of gravity is reversed upon any body which vibrates perpendicularly to the plane of the ecliptic with a frequency which is an even multiple of the logarithm of two to the Naperian base 'e.' At once, special vibrating cars were constructed which carried mankind to all the planets. That discovery of Professor P222D29333 Male did nothing less than open up seven new territories to our inhabitants; namely: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. In the great land rush that ensued, thousands who were previously poor became rich.

"But, gentlemen, land, which so far had constituted one of the main sources of wealth, was shortly to become valuable for individual golf links only, as it is today, on account of another scientific discovery.

"This second discovery was in reality, not a discovery, but the perfection of a chemical process, the principles of which had been known for many centuries. I am alluding to the construction of the vast reducing factories, one upon each planet, to which the bodies of all persons who have died on their respective planets are at once shipped by Aerial Express. Since this process is used today, all of you understand the methods employed; how each body is reduced by heat to its component constituents: hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, phosphorus, and so forth; how these separated constituents are stored in special reservoirs together with the components from thousands of other corpses; how these elements are then synthetically combined into food tablets for those of us who are yet alive—thus completing an endless chain from the dead to the living. Naturally then, agriculture and stock-raising ceased, since the food problem, with which man had coped from time immemorial, was solved. The two direct results were, first—that land lost the inflated values it had possessed when it was necessary for tillage, and second—that men were at last given enough leisure to enter the fields of science and art.

"And as to the John Jones Dollar, which now embraced countless industries and vast territory on the earth, it stood, in value:

2614 700 years $912,000,000

"In truth, gentlemen, it now constituted the largest private fortune on the terrestrial globe. And in that year, 2614 A.D., there were thirteen generations yet to come, before John Jones the fortieth, would arrive.

"To continue. In the year 2714 A.D., an important political battle was concluded in the Solar System Senate and House of Representatives. I am referring to the great controversy as to whether the Earth's moon was a sufficient menace to interplanetary navigation to warrant its removal. The outcome of the wrangle was that the question was decided in the affirmative. Consequently—

"But I beg your pardon, young men. I occasionally lose sight of the fact that you are not so well informed upon historical matters as myself. Here I am, talking to you about the moon, totally forgetful that many of you are puzzled as to my meaning. I advise all of you who have not yet attended the Solaris Museum on Jupi-

ter, to take a trip there some Sunday afternoon. The Interplanetary Suburban Line runs trains every half hour on that day. You will find there a complete working model of the old satellite of the Earth, which, before it was destroyed, furnished this planet light at night through the crude medium of reflection.

"On account of this decision as to the inadvisability of allowing the moon to remain where it was, engineers commenced its removal in the year 2714. Piece by piece, it was chipped away and brought to the Earth in Interplanetary freight cars. These pieces were then propelled by Zoodolite explosive, in the direction of the Milky Way, with a velocity of 11,217 meters per second. This velocity, of course, gave each departing fragment exactly the amount of kinetic energy it required to enable it to overcome the backward pull of the Earth from here to infinity. I daresay those moon-hunks are going yet.

"At the start of the removal of the moon in 2714 A.D., the accumulated wealth of John Jones the fortieth, stood:

2714 800 years $17,400,000,000

"Of course, with such a colossal sum at their command, the directors of the fund had made entensive investments on Mars and Venus.

By the end of the twenty-eighth century, or the year 2800 A.D., the moon had been completely hacked away and sent piecemeal into space, the job having required 86 years. I give, herewith, the result of John Jones's dollar, both at the date when the moon was completely removed, and also at the close of the 900th year after its deposit:

2800 886 years $219,000,000,000
2814 900 years $332,000,000,000

"The meaning of those figures, gentlemen, as stated in simple language, was that the John Jones Dollar now comprised practically all the wealth on Earth, Mars, and Venus—with the exception of one university site on each planet, which was, of course, school property.

"And now I will ask you to advance with me to the year 2899 A.D. In this year the directors of the John Jones fund awoke to the fact that they were in a dreadful predicament. According to the agreement under which John Jones deposited his Dollar away back in the year 1914, interest was to be compounded annually at three per cent. In the year 2899 A.D., the thirty-ninth generation of John Jones was alive, being represented by a gentleman named J664M42721Male, who was thirty years of age and engaged to be married to a young lady named T246M42652Female.

"Doubtless, you will ask, what was the predicament in which the directors found themselves. Simply this:

"A careful appraisement of the wealth on Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, and likewise Earth, together with an accurate calculation of the remaining heat in the Sun and an appraisement of that heat at a very decent valuation per calorie, demonstrated that the total wealth of the Solar System amounted to $6,309,525,241,362,15.

"But, unfortunately, a simple computation showed that if Mr. J664M42721Male married Miss T246M42-

652Female, and was blessed by a child by the year 2914, which year marked the thousandth year since the deposit of the John Jones Dollar, then in that year there would be due the child, the following amount:

2914 1000 years $6,310,000,000.00

"It simply showed beyond all possibility of argument, that by 2914 A.D., we would be $474,758,637.85 shy—that we would be unable to meet the debt to John Jones the fortieth.

"I tell you, gentlemen, the board of directors were frantic. Such wild suggestions were put forth as the sending of an expeditionary force to the nearest star in order to capture some other Solar System and thus obtain more territory to make up the deficit. But that project was impossible on account of the number of years that it would have required.

"Visions of immense law suits disturbed the slumber of those unfortunate individuals who formed the John Jones Dollar Directorship. But on the brink of one of the biggest civil actions the courts have ever known, something occurred that altered everything."

The professor again withdrew the tiny instrument from his vest pocket, held it to his ear and adjusted the switch. A metallic voice rasped: "Fifteen o'clock and fifty-two minutes —fifteen o'clock and fifty-two minutes —fift——' He replaced the instrument and went on with his talk.

"I must hasten to the conclusion of my lecture, gentlemen, as I have an engagement with Professor C122B24-999Male of the University of Saturn at sixteen o'clock. Now, let me see; I was discussing the big civil action that was hanging over the heads of the John Jones Dollar directors.

"Well, this Mr. J664M42721Male, the thirty-ninth descendant of the original John Jones, had a lover's quarrel with Miss T246M42652Female, which immediately destroyed the probability of their marriage. Neither gave in to the other. Neither ever married. And when Mr. J664-M42721Male died, in 2940 A.D., of a broken heart, as it was claimed, he was single and childless.

"As a result, there was no one to turn the Solar System over to. Immediately, the Interplanetary Government stepped in and took possession of it. At that instant, of course, private property ceased. In the twinkling of an eye almost, we reached the true socialistic and democratic condition for which man had futilely hoped throughout the ages.

"That is all today, gentlemen. Class is dismissed."

One by one, the faces faded from the Visaphone.

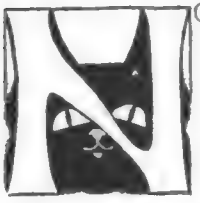
For a moment, the professor stood ruminating.

"A wonderful man, that old socialist, John Jones the first," he said softly to himself, "a far-seeing man, a bright man, considering that he lived in such a dark era as the twentieth century. But how nearly his well contrived scheme went wrong. Suppose that that fortieth descendant had been born?"

The Backsliding of Unc' Bad-eye Johnson

BY WELLINGTON VANDIVER

A "bad nigger" gets religion and hits the glory trail—but before he is officially saved he becomes a backslider.



OTHING was wrong with his optics; his eyes were as good as yours. The Police Docket gave his name as "Bad-Eye." An admiring negro constituency referred to him, in his absence, as "Unc' Bad-Eye." In the days of his childhood—if he had ever had a childhood—his mother might have called him "Sweetie" or Lazarus, Opodeldoc, Epaminondas or William, but at the present writing, the negro, boss of the colored population of the city, was known as "Bad-Eye" Johnson; probably on account of the baleful gleams from a pair of yellowish black optics.

Bad-Eye Johnson had successfully curbed the ambitious efforts of a visiting representative of Atlanta's toughest Darktown District to get into the ballroom at "Hominy Hall" without paying, and the order had been given by him to the orchestra to resume playing. A well-seasoned pick handle had been the chief argument used in the discussion with the ebullient gent from the Gate City. Tucking this handy implement gracefully under his left arm, Unc' Bad-Eye advanced to the centre of the floor, and announced to the assembled group of cocaine-snuffers, blind tiger operators, cooks, nurses, porch climbers and Ethiopian Society, that the music could "continue on."

It was worth the price of admission, any time, to observe Bad-Eye regulating manners, as well as morals, in that dancing joint. Undoubtedly he was the high, low and middle Justice of Niggerdom, the absolute autocrat of the Darkey Underworld in the city. About the size of an ordinary wood shed, nearly seven feet high, muscles equal to a Texas steer, black, imperious, dominating, with a razor up his sleeve, the ever present pick handle in his brawny fist, Bad-Eye wielded far more influence than the Deity in the Shades of Darkeydom.

The colored crooks paid tribute to him from every dive in the city. His barber-shop was headquarters for the swell-mob — his Cat-fish Restyraw fed the coon with the suddenly annexed "Long green." The continuous crap game at the rear of his shop yielded him a rake-off of comfortable proportions; the "Hominy Hall Dance Parlors" itself, was no small source of revenue, with its blind tiger and skin-game attachments; the peanut, soda pop, and coca-cola bar, masking the stronger liquids.

To Bad-Eye, standing near the centre of the floor, with his legs

wide apart, similar to the Colossus of Rhodes, came a coon with the complexion of coal-dust, whose garments resembled an Aurora Borealis, topped with a phoney diamond, the size of a stopper to an ordinary vinegar cruet, south of which was a watch-chain big enough to hold an ox.

Confidentially this colored Christmas Tree remarked to Bad-Eye: "Cap! I is de boss screech from Birmin'ham in de sport line. Does you know where a gen'leman could git a lil' game wid de bones, or de kyards?"

Warily Bad-Eye surveyed the hectic garments—the Solomon-in-all-his-glory raiments of the questioner, before he deigned an answer: "Nigger Detective from Burmin'ham drapped in here last Fall—huntin' er game—he found one—shortly after that time de Burmin'ham sport quit detectin'—folks toted him out in a black pine box, walkin' slow. De detectin' business ain't healthy for a nigger," slowly spoke Bad-Eye.

"Cap, you does me wrong," remonstrated the "Screech." "I'm all right; de perlice run me out'n Birmin'ham, suspicioned of kyards and craps. I can prove up my karacter by two or three ladies and gemmen on dis floor. I ain't no more a detective den I is a hant."

The sincerity of his tones, together with his offer of local proof, convinced Bad-Eye that the citizen from Birmingham was a card sharp as represented.

"Please retire wid me to de adj'inin' room," remarked Bad-Eye, with his grandest manner, "and maybe we kin find a gen'leman in dere what will drap a nickel in de slot, and let you see it rain."

A den of box-car size, reeking with the smoke of cheap cheroots, where the air was so thick with the scent of perspiring stable sports and mean whiskey that saddle bags could be successfully hung on it, proved to be the "adj'inin' room." Around a thick blanket spread on the floor, a huge ring of intent gamblers knelt, or sprawled, while one of the number, with monkey-like activities, whirled his closed hands before scattering the dice upon the blanket, fervently ejaculating just previous to each throw: "Little Joe! Come little Joe, seben come eleben, Zip!" then scattering the cubes upon the blanket.

"Woof!" sputtered the Birmingham sport, "dis shorely does remind me of home. Dis is Birmin'ham, all right, all right. Lemme in on dem festivities. I fades you-all for a dollar."

"Huh," observed the Birmingham darkey, when his money disappeared on the next throw into the pocket of the operator of the bones. "Dat dollar didn't last no longer dan a Junebug at a Peckerwood meetin'."

But in a little while the gambler from Birmingham secured the dice, and from that time on, he won about every other throw. Slowly player after player ceased betting as his pile was won. After thirty minutes of rapid play, the gambler from the city grew triumphant, chaffing the others at each throw: "I told you dat you country niggers didn't know nothin' 'bout shooting craps. You ought to practice moonlight nights and of Sundays. It takes brains to play dis here game." Just as he was closing the

act of making a throw with the dice, Bad-Eye Johnson, who was standing immediately behind the Birmingham sport, with a pitcher of water and a tumbler in his hand, dropped both to the floor with a crash, shivering the glass into many fragments. Like a flash, the Birmingham negro turned his head. In that brief instant, with a motion quicker than the striking of a rattlesnake, Slick Amos, the player sitting next to "Birmingham," seized the dice with which the play had been made, substituted his own cubes instead, and dropped back into his former attitude. Bad-Eye grumbled an apology for his own awkwardness, after which the game proceeded, but with vastly different results. Steadily the sport from the Magic City lost to the accompaniment of the gibes of the "country niggers." No expedient seemed to change the "luck." Turning his coat wrong side outward, rubbing a fragment of lodestone on the dice, walking around a chair, rubbing his hands with a rabbit's foot, producing a "Conjuror's bag" containing a scrap of red flannel, a frog leg tied with three white hairs, proved of no avail, as "Birmingham" lost without interruption until he announced himself as "cleaned out."

"Looks like there ain't any way for a church membah to make a honest livin' out'n you low-down niggers no way you kin fix it," he said as he quit in disgust.

"Slick Amos," cashier, lieutenant, as well as faithful understudy of Unc' Bad-Eye, reporting to his principal the "receipts of the evening," handed over a roll of greenbacks big enough to choke a cow, at a late hour, commenting at the same time on the episode of the "Burmin'ham nigger wid de glad rags:" "Dat sport," said he, " 'worked hosses' on us for a lil' while, until you broke dat pitcher and gimme a chance to nab dem bones, and from dat time on I faded him wid dese here hosses to a fare-you-well," exhibiting a pair of loaded dice. The cubes were so filled with lead that the spots ace and six, or six and five, always fell or rolled uppermost, thereby totalling seven or eleven, the winning numbers in craps.

"Dat's right son," nodded Unc' Bad-Eye approvingly, at the same time skinning a ten dollar bill off the roll, which he handed to Slick Amos. "Don't never let no Burmin'ham tinhorn sport saw off any funny biz on dis lay-out. De bible was plum right when it say dat de 'sinnah digs a pit for another nigger, and falls in it hisself.' Honesty is de best policy if it do sometimes make a man damn poor.

"How is dat 'tracted meetin' gettin' erlong? Dey tells me you is a regular mourner."

The congregation of Mount Canaan Church—called "Mount" Canaan because it was situated hopelessly low in the middle of an overflowed flat, with no "Mount" in miles of it—had concluded their own Pastor lacked "Pep," which defect it was proposed to remedy by sending for a colored Evangelist to conduct a tent meeting. That Divine had arrived; the meeting was at white heat. The visiting Preacher had proved to be torrid, flaming, hectic, to the last degree. His perfervid discourses on Hell and Damnation, causing the sinners to

Dictionary." As near as possible, Bad-Eye put up a first-class imitation of a "Godly walk and conversation," at all times endeavoring to twist his fierce features into a smug, meek penitent advertisement of the supposedly pious thoughts within. At times, when not within the ken of any of the "flock," his hair-trigger temper got the better of his righteous demeanor, but it was a small matter to again assume the phiz of a brunette saint after the eruption had passed.

It was a matter of some worry, however, to Bad-Eye, that his religious bearings, his nightly sitting under the droppings of the Sanctuary, his steady, loyal backing up of the cayenne rantings of the "Visiting Reverend," did not seem to produce much impression on the Evangelist.

On the contrary, that "Bible-banger" smiled sardonically at the deeply pious grunts, the mighty Amens of the "Seeker." He apparently refused to enthuse over Bad-Eye's obtrusive change of heart, which indifference caused that worthy to confide to Slick Amos: "Dat spindling nigger Preachaw is got prejudis' in his heart agin' me. Little ol' Bantam! If he fools wid me I shore will raise up. Dem yaller coon 'Vangelists makes me sick."

Great was the rejoicing on an eventful night at the tent when, at the top of the great swells of melody produced by a thousand lusty throats, Unc' Bad-Eye swam up to the mourners' bench to be prayed for. Bathed in perspiration, groaning like a horse with the colic, Unc' Bad-Eye wallowed in the straw, while the Old Guard of Deacons and Sisters rallied around his prostrate form, yelling prayers and ejaculations of glory at the top of stentorian voices. In about twenty minutes of "wrastlin' in prayer," an aged brother with a voice like a siren whistle arose and announced that "Br'er Johnson have come through." This was the signal for another outburst of prayer, praise and song. Looking much chastened, Unc' Bad-Eye arose from his knees to take a sitting posture facing the rejoicing congregation. After a whispered consultation with the "mourner," the officiating Minister announced that the "Baptizin' would take place the following Sabbath in de branch near de Ice Plant." Many congratulatory hands gripped those of Bad-Eye, welcoming him as a candidate for Church membership. Specially fervent was the grasp of Slick Amos, who expressed the hope in a loud voice, that "Br'er Johnson would make a good membah and useful officer of dat church, and one dat could keep de books and de money all straight." The latter thought met with a hearty accord from all the hearers, except the Evangelist, who slightly frowned.

On the appointed Sabbath, the colored constituency gathered at the Baptizin' Pool about three thousand strong. A small brook, called "The Branch," had been damned by them, making a little lake thirty feet in length, five feet deep, and ten feet in width, with unusually steep banks. On the levee, penning this pool on both sides, hundreds craned necks to see how Pastor and Convert deported themselves. The Evangelist waded out into the stream first,

then turned and awaited the approach of the candidate. Unc' Bad-Eye, dressed within an inch of his life, gingerly felt his cautious way down the bank, and into the water, eyeing dubiously the slender form, the attenuated arms, the flabby muscles of the pigmy Reverend, but nevertheless advancing until he reached the Preacher's side. The Parson seized the "Seeker" in the conventional way, and as he tilted him slowly backward began with the ritualistic form, "Brother Johnson, I baptize thee—" but he got very little beyond this, as the immense weight of Unc' Bad-Eye broke the Preacher's hold on him, resulting in the candidate sinking in five feet of water, and giving him an accidental, but thorough ducking.

Spouting water more than a porpoise, with both fists clenched, Unc' Bad-Eye rose out of that pool fairly choking with muddy water and wrath. Wading rapidly to the shore, he climbed the steep bank, dripping like the eaves of a house; then shaking himself as does a wet dog, he turned so as to survey the entire scene. For a moment, he made an effort to command his temper, but failed; then, although he could fairly see that five hundred dollars drifting away from him, nevertheless, he shook his fists at the entire concourse, saying splutteringly: "Some nigger is going to get drownded, yet, with this damn foolishness," and walked away without a word or glance backward.

At the far edge of the crowd he turned and bawled with the full strength of his leather lungs: "Dat yaller nigger Preacher is a fake; he let me loose on purpose. Go to hell wid your old church; I has done backslid."

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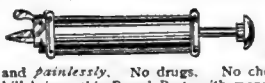

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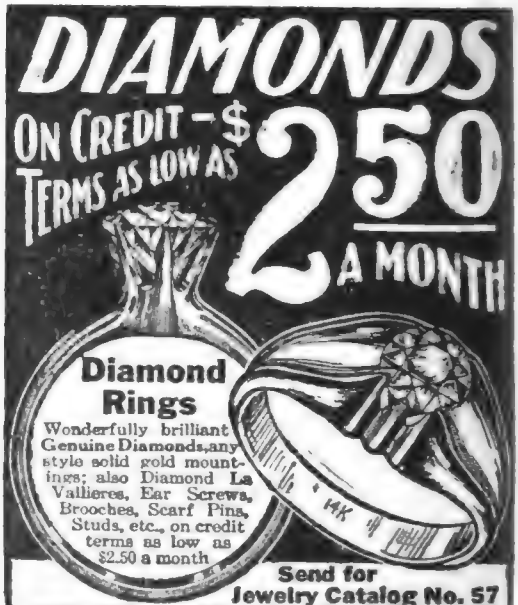

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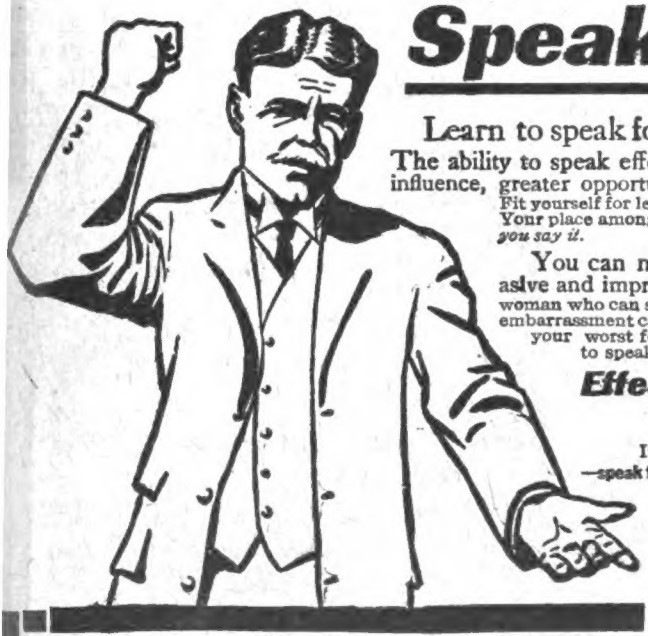

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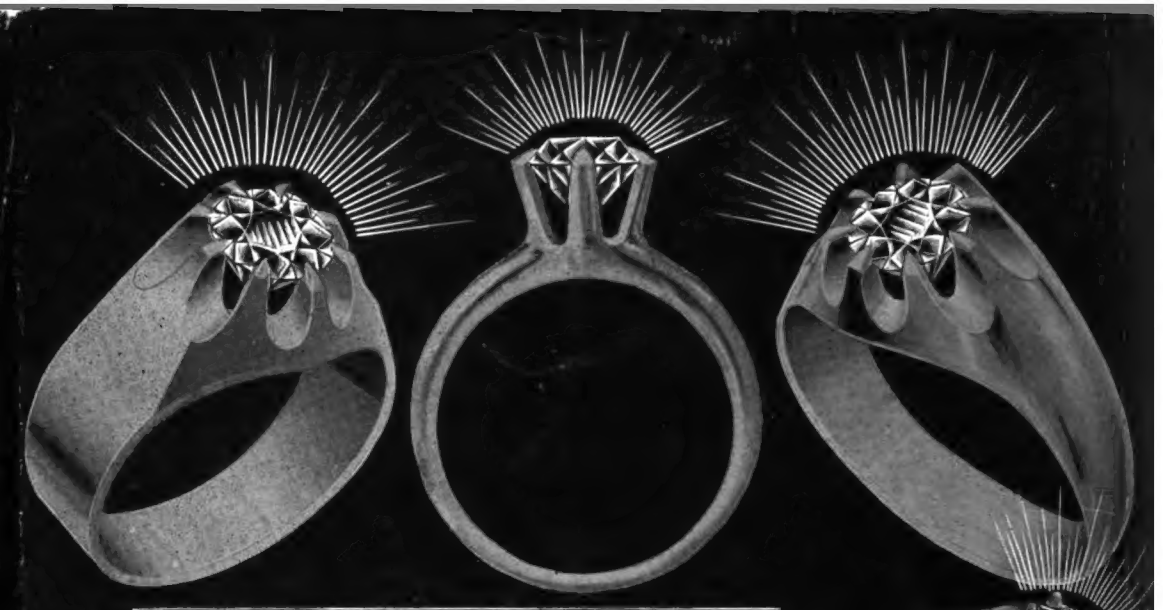

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